

Recruiting is a Risk Business

In companies today the outlay of capital expenditure is submitted to rigorous scrutiny. Hours upon hours of management time (and no little heartache!) are poured into trying to ensure it will deliver the very best for your venture before you buy it. Testing that the item will be able to stand the stresses of what it will be expected to do.

- Can it work at the right pace?
- Will it start when you ask it to and respond reliably over time?
- Will it deliver the right level of quality to show this business in the very best light?
- Will it give the customer what they want?
- Can you reasonably expect it to work effectively with your other machinery?
- Does it have any particular quirks and foibles that may make it difficult to work with?
- Does it have a proven track record?
- How flexible are the outputs you can expect from it?
- What level of output can it sustain under normal conditions?
- What if you had an unexpected surge in demand – could it respond?
- How can it be developed in the future if it needs to grow with the business?



most companies ever contemplate 'shelling out' on equipment.

I must point out that I fully accept (before an enraged reader feels compelled to phone me and put a rather large bee in my capex!) that all the effort in buying capital equipment is essential risk management. What I would like to persuade people to do is also regard the effective hiring of staff as essential risk management. If you want to recruit good people, and keep them, you must make sure your recruitment processes address all the key areas to help you get, and keep, a good employee.

One key first observation is that whatever you do in your recruitment process you must make sure that it is done professionally. If your recruitment effort comes across to the candidate as unprofessional, disorganised and poorly structured, the candidate will be left with the impression that the rest of your business is much the same. Make sure that anyone involved in recruiting people for your business knows the standards that you expect of them. The following must not be a part of how you recruit: -

- keeping the candidate waiting well past their allotted time
- being poorly prepared for the interview
- not reading the CV beforehand

All this, and more besides, for a piece of machinery. No doubting that it is all good solid stuff. But what do you do about your investment in your people before you 'buy' them? After all it's a very common observation from managers of most businesses that it is the people that cause the most problems - not the machinery. Think about it, all the above questions apply equally to your potential investment in people. And people can represent a much greater level of investment in £'s than

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- even worse, actually admitting to not having read it in front of the candidate
- spending most of the interview telling the candidate about the company or the interviewer's 'greatness'
- failing to thank the candidate for attending
- conducting the interview using the 'good cop/bad cop' routine
- make overblown statements about career prospects

I'm sure you can think of others. If not ask your staff for bad examples from their past, they won't struggle to give you a few!

For most companies, at least for those that have yet to see 'the light', the process of recruitment revolves around two things – how quickly and how cheaply can they recruit someone. Time and time again this is the root cause of the 'people' difficulties further down the line that managers complain so regularly about. Nevertheless far too many managers continue to operate with these two drivers underpinning how they run a recruitment campaign. Putting a bum on a seat may well tick the box on the 'To Do' list, but all too often it creates a long list of new 'To Do's' aimed at managing the after-effects of a poor choice. That choice is the fault of the recruiting company and NOT the interviewee. They made the offer in the first place, the interviewee merely said "yes".

Most companies rely heavily, if not exclusively, on the traditional face-2-face interview alone in order to select their staff. It clearly has an important place in the overall process but it has long been accepted that the interview has many flaws in its make up. These are made worse if the interviewers are lacking in skill and experience. The interview will also not effectively target several elements of the risk inherent in securing the best candidate. Staying in their comfort zones means most interviewers focus on the technical knowledge and qualifications areas highlighted in Figure 1.1. It then becomes an issue of ego for the interviewer who tends to prefer the candidate who is deferential to the interviewer's achievements and ability. I'm sure there is a psychological complex for this but

this author doesn't know the name for it.

In figure 1.1 it has been assumed that a traditional interview is conducted and that all the interviewers are trained and experienced. With a competent interviewer, they should be able to get reliable evidence for the areas shaded green. For the blue areas it would be 'hit or miss' if you found reliable evidence and the red areas wouldn't be covered. For a large proportion of your key vacancies I'm safe guessing that you would want to assess an individual's knowledge, skills and experience in the areas shown in figure 1.1. Traditional

the gross misconduct type, rather the variety where a new member of staff just isn't performing against expected standards. As any experienced manager will tell you, the trouble with that sort of problem is that it tends to demand much more management resource to deal with it than a gross misconduct case.

So how can you go about minimising the risk of recruiting someone to a more acceptable level? Some solutions to this involve complex recruitment procedures or the use of expensive consultants, neither of which are absolutely essential. A well-constructed

Assessment Centre will target the areas relevant to a particular role with a series of carefully chosen exercises. They don't need to be expensive. For instance, a comprehensive personality profile could cover management, leadership and even selling styles. It would cost no more than £180-300. The 'pay off', however, can be significant. Using the personality assessment at a final interview can also produce individually targeted questions that will further reduce the risks when choosing a candidate.

Making sure that your managers are trained in effective questioning and interviewing techniques can be done quickly and costs effectively to help your interviewers get to the issues that really matter.



interview approaches leave more than two thirds of the areas not covered adequately or simply not covered at all – regardless of how good the interviewer is at their job. Now ask yourself the question – would I risk buying a piece of equipment knowing so little about it? No? Then why buy a member of staff knowing so little about them? It's quite simply storing up potential problems further down the road of your employment relationship with them. And the type of problems I am referring to are not

Making sure that your managers are trained in effective questioning and interviewing techniques can be done quickly and costs effectively to help your interviewers get to the issues that really matter. You can then effectively turn each of the red and blue areas in Figure 1.1 to green. No recruitment process is absolutely guaranteed to return perfect results all the time. What is certainly true, however, is that if you target the elements of the process at all the elements of risk, you will have a far greater chance of getting the results you really want for your business.

If you haven't got an HR department with skilled interviewers, why not 'contract-in' that service as and when you need it. Hourly rates for experienced interviewers to sit beside you in the recruitment process should be between £65 and £80. Not too much more than the charge-out rate for a mechanic when your main dealer services your car! And you thought they would be too expensive!

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