5.3 Selection Methods

Common selection methods organizations use to gain information about and narrow down potential candidates are resumes and application forms, testing, interviews, reference checks, honesty tests, medical exams, and drug screening.

1. Resumes and Application Forms

Job applications and resumes are the organization’s initial method of collecting information about potential recruits. A major downside of resumes and job applications is the considerable and unmanageable volume of them that HR departments receive. In most cases, it is extremely challenging to control or carefully consider all these documents. Application forms assist in gathering basic information about applicants that can be grouped into four main categories: contact information, work experience, educational background, as well as the applicant’s signature validating all the information indicated in the application form.

Resumes, on the other hand, are controlled by the applicants rather than the employers, which introduces a source of bias and inaccuracy not present in application forms. However, resumes provide an economical method for collecting initial information, identifying potential hires with the basic requirements such as job experience and educational background, as well as selecting applicants for further consideration. Although sometimes misleading, resumes provide applicants more freedom in expressing themselves and highlighting personal experiences that structured application forms may not permit.

2. Testing

The next logical step after candidates have been initially screened through resumes and job applications is to test those applicants in order to further screen and narrow down the choice to a few top candidates. This is the main objective of conducting such tests. In broad terms, there are two main types of tests that organizations employ: aptitude tests and achievement tests.

Aptitude refers to how quickly or easily one will be able to learn in the future (Carter, 2007). Aptitude tests evaluate the test taker’s level of reception, comprehension, and retention. The most prominent aptitude test is called the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB). Achievement tests, on the other hand, determine the individual’s current KSAOs. In other words, achievement tests are qualification examinations to ensure that applicants are ready to perform the tasks they are recruited for.

Organizations can use many other forms of tests, depending on the type of job involved. For example, physical ability tests are conducted only for jobs demanding certain physical job performance requirements, for the purpose of mitigating injuries related to certain job activities (Buffardi, Fleishman, Morath, & McCarthy, 2000; Hogan, 1991).

The cognitive ability test, also referred to as the intelligence test, is primarily designed to assess the applicant’s mental abilities. Such tests are particularly relevant for complicated jobs demanding considerable mental capabilities (Salagado, Anderson, Moscoso, Bertuas, &De Fruyt, 2003; Ree, Earles, & Teachout, 1994). Job performance tests, also commonly referred to as work sample tests, are also used by organizations for specialized types of jobs demanding continuously high productivity and performance, such as keyboarding or high-volume machine operation. Job performance tests are mostly conducted through simulations of the actual work setting (Winkler, 2006).

3. Interviews

Job interviews are one of the most commonly used hiring tools, and they come in many shapes and sizes.

Many employers prefer to directly interact with their future employees, usually face to face, for a more accurate evaluation of their communication skills, interpersonal skills, and technical experience and knowledge. That is why the job interview is one of the most commonly used selection tools in employment. There are several types of interviews that organizations use. These types of interviews are listed and described below. Examples of each type of interview and tips for successfully conducting them (as an interviewer) or doing well at them (as an interviewee) are provided in the links that follow.

Unstructured interviews mostly involve open-ended questions. The interviewee’s answer to one question determines the interviewer’s progression to the next question. Questions are often related to personal career objectives and expectations, as well as points of strength and weakness. A major problem with unstructured interviews is their inability to stand up to scrutiny from the standards of the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures if challenged in court. The Uniformed Guidelines were established to aid hiring agencies in complying with Federal laws regulating employment practices (Biddle Consulting Group, 2015). A review of Federal Court cases between 1978 and 1997 involving charges of discriminatory hiring demonstrated that unstructured interviews were challenged in court more often than any other selection device and in 41% of the cases the unstructured interview was found to be discriminatory in nature (Terpstra, Mohamed, & Kethley, 1999).

Structured interviews follow a set of pre-established questions that mainly focus on the interviewee’s knowledge, work experience, and technical skills. Structured interviews provide organizations with more valid and reliable results compared to unstructured interviews.

Situational interviews depict a real work-related scenario that interviewers present to the interviewees to evaluate their problem-solving capabilities (Clavenger, Perreira, Weichmann, Schmitt, & Harvey, 2001; McDaniel, Morgeson, Finnegan, Campion, & Braverman, 2001).

Behavior description interviews allow the interviewees to describe how they handled a certain past situation to assess their experiences (Campion, Campion, & Hudson, 1994; Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995).

In panel interviews, two or more representatives from the organization meet in a group setting with the interviewee. This type of interview has the advantage of using multiple raters; hence, it is less biased.

Web Links

Structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrDONsoVoXE&feature=related>

Situational interviews

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQHneHS7P_Q>

Behavioral interviews

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKBubKO-798>

Panel interviews

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX4ofZoN6Zw>

4. Reference Checks

Application forms often ask applicants to provide reliable reference sources, such as former employers, so that organizations can verify applicants’ capabilities and past experiences. In reality, however, references are not a very reliable source for verifying information since applicants are careful to choose only references that are most likely to present them in a favorable light.

Providing references for former employees can be risky for employers due to possible lawsuits. For example, positive references can trigger lawsuits when new employers claim they have been misled if an employee’s conduct has not been as expected after a certain period of employment (Long, 1997). On the other hand, negative references can cause former employees to claim defamation and loss of reputation, even with limited evidence (Ryan & Lasek, 1991). For these reasons, organizations should be cautious in providing former employees with references, carefully focusing only on job-related experience and behavior rather than treading into personal opinions that might be misinterpreted. However, such references may leave organizations with narrower descriptions of applicants’ past performances, which undermines the purpose of their seeking out references in the first place.

5. Honesty Tests, Medical Exams, and Drug Screening

Some jobs involve physically demanding tasks and responsibilities. Accordingly, many organizations conduct medical and fitness examinations to ensure that employees are capable of successfully performing the assigned job requirements. Another purpose of these tests is to determine applicants’ initial physical status, prior to employment, for future evaluation in case of a work-related injury or disability. Organizations must practice extreme caution in using physical examinations for potential recruits to avoid any discriminatory claims.

Employees are also expected to maintain acceptable levels of honesty and integrity inside and outside the organization. Although reference checks and interviews can assess honest behavior, some organizations rely on more direct verification methods, such as honesty tests. Honesty tests using the polygraph were banned in 1988 and replaced with written integrity tests that, although not as effective, have some ability to highlight negative behavioral issues (Bernardin & Cooke, 1993; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993). However, research supports the validity of these tests (Van Iddekinge, Roth, Raymark, & Odle-Dusseau, 2012).

Furthermore, employees are expected to not to engage in unsafe behaviors such as the use of illegal drugs or the abuse of controlled substances. Alcohol and drug screening is an accurate and reliable method for exposing substance abuse. However, many individuals see alcohol and drug screening as a controversial privacy invasion that can lead to false accusations of substance abuse. Some organizations avoid these problems by relying on other types of testing, such as impairment and fitness tests for duty programs, which mainly assess mental abilities in carrying out critical tasks rather than analyzing the root cause of impairment.