
Staff Selection And Interview Techniques In Organization

By

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Abstract

Most organizations fail to achieve their goals due to lack of adequate or qualified staff for various positions. Staff selection process and interview techniques are therefore very imperative in every organization that operates to achieve some goals and objectives. This is so because human resource is an important factor of production and without having the right employees, there is no way the objectives of the organization can be actualized. This paper examines the process of staff selection and interview techniques in organization, which include – the merit system, steps in the selection process and selection tests required to bring the right person into the right position. In carrying out this investigation, relevant documents and materials were utilized to elicit information for the study. The paper concludes that the application of merit principles, appropriate interview techniques and adherence to the organizational staff selection process is very vital in selecting the right people for the right positions.

Selection is an important function of public personnel administration, with complex process and steps to bring about the right or best applicants for employment. Casio (2002) asserted that recruitment and selection begins with clear statement of objectives based on the types of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that an organization needs. Selection process involves a series of steps that add time and complexity to the hiring decision. Although important, this time and complexity can lead to frustration for applicants who need jobs and for operating managers who need their job openings filled. According to Shafritz, Russel and Borick (2007), selection is the oldest function of public personnel administration. Selection is the exercise of choosing the best through the process of rejecting or matching of the applicants, first against the attributes which is expected to make for success on the job and, secondly, matching of the candidates in rank order for relative suitability.

The selection process is a series of specific steps used to decide which recruits should be hired, that is sifting applicants to get the best candidates. As Rachman and

Mescon (1985) put it, after going through at least one but usually more of the various recruitment steps the human resources department may spend weeks and sometimes even months sifting through the many applications. Eventually, the choice is narrowed down and the selection process begins. Whatever method used depends on the organization, but there are basic processes which most organizations go through. First, a small number of qualified candidates are selected. A person may be chosen on the basis of a standard application that all candidates are required to fill out or on the basis of his resume – a summary of education, experience, interests, and other personal data compiled by the applicant. Sometimes both sources are used. The next stage is to interview each candidate, and depending on the type of job at stake, the candidates may be asked to take a test or series of tests to gauge their abilities, aptitude, intelligence, interests, and sometimes even their personalities.

The selection process ideally involves mutual decision. The organization decides whether to make a job offer and the applicant decides whether the organization and the job offer fit his or her need and goals. In reality, the selection process is often more one-sided. In situations when the job market is extremely tight, several candidates will be applying for each position, and managers at the organization will use a series of screening devices to identify the most suitable candidate. On the other hand, when there is shortage of qualified workers, or when the candidate is a highly qualified executive or professional being sought for, by several organizations, managers at the organization will have to sweeten the offer and come to a quicker decision (Aibieyi, 2009)..

Merit Selection

Merit system in selection process is an act or means of choosing the good or best applicants who adequately meets the organizational employment criteria for certain vacant positions. The 1883 Pendleton Act, which put the federal government of Nigeria on the road to widespread, merit-system coverage, foreshadowed the character of the examinations process when it mandated that “examinations shall be practical in their character.” According to Shafritz, Russel and Borick (2007), as the British civil service was the greatest single example and influence upon the U.S. reform movement, there was considerable concern that a merit system based on the British system of competitive academic examinations would be automatically biased in favour of college graduates. Because higher education in the United States was essentially an upper-class activity at that time, this was reminiscent of the aristocratic civil service that the Jacksonian movement found so objectionable only 50 years earlier. Mandating that all examinations be “practical in their character” presumably neutralized any advantage that a college graduate might have, for in those days there was little that was “practical” taught in most U.S. colleges.

Job relatedness is now the paramount consideration in developing a selection device. The legality of any test hinges on its capability in predicting job success, and validation is the process of demonstrating how well the testing device actually can predict success on the job. While examinations were once simply technical and administrative problems of the personnel department, they are now of equal concern to a jurisdiction's legal office. The thrust of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 is to stop, by providing legal remedies for, acts of discrimination in hiring, assignments, promotional opportunities, or any other benefits or conditions of employment (Shafritz, Russell and Borick 2007).

Steps in the Selection Process

The standard of hiring sequence is the seven-step procedure described in table I below. In practice, however, the actual selection process varies with different organizations and between levels in the same organization. For example, the selection interview for lower-level employees may be quite perfunctory. Emphasis may be placed instead on the initial screening interview or on tests. Although written tests designed to define a candidate's interests, aptitudes, and intelligence were long a staple of employment screening.

In selecting middle-or upper-level managers, the interview may be extensive and there may be little or no formal testing. Instead of initially filling out an application, the candidate may submit a resume. Completion of the formal application may be delayed until after the job offer has been accepted. Some organizations omit the physical examination for managers hired at this level. For many positions, particularly in management, the in-depth interview is an important factor in management's decision to make a job offer and in the individual's decision to accept or decline the offer. The most effective interviews are those that are best able to predict the eventual performance of applicants which are usually planned carefully. Ideally, all candidates for the same position are asked the same questions. Most interviews, however, tend to be far less structured and deliberate.

The reliability of the interview may be affected by the differing objectives of the interviewer and interviewee. The prospective employer wants to sell the organization as a good place to work and may therefore exaggerate its strengths; the prospective employee wants to be hired and may therefore exaggerate his or her qualities. Some managers have attempted to reduce this problem through the realistic job preview (RJP), in which candidates are exposed to the unattractive as well as the attractive aspects of the job, and by using structured, focused interviews to acquire a more accurate picture of each interviewee's likely job performance.

Table 1 Steps in the Selection Process

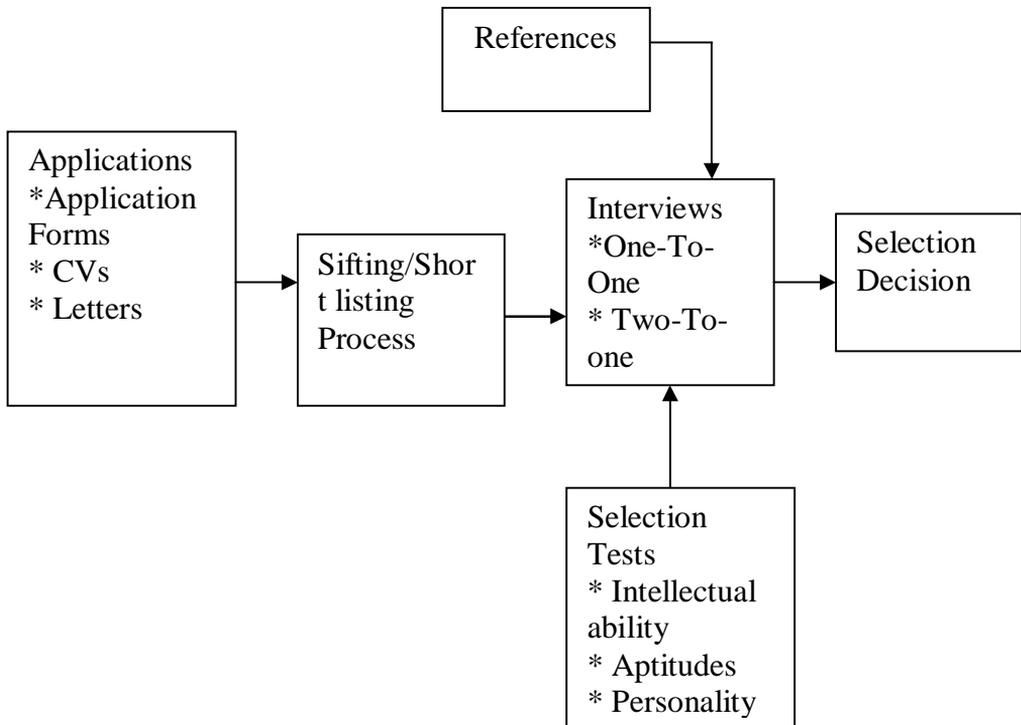
	PROCEDURES	PURPOSES	ACTIONS AND TRENDS
1.	Completed job application	Indicates applicant's desired position, provides information for interviews	Requests only information that predicts success in the job
2.	Initial screening interview	Provides a quick evaluation of applicant's suitability	Asks questions on experience, salary expectation, willingness to relocate
3.	Testing	Measures applicant's job skills and the ability to learn on the job	May include computer testing software, handwriting analysis, medical and physical ability.
4.	Background investigation	Checks truthfulness of applicant's resume or application form	Calls the applicant's previous supervisor (with permission) and confirms information from applicant
5.	In-depth selection interview	Finds out more about the applicant as an individual.	Conducted by the manager to whom the applicant will report.
6.	Physical examination	Ensures effective performance by applicant; protects other employees against diseases; establishes health record on applicant; protects firm against unjust worker's compensation claims	Often performed by company's medical doctor
7.	Job offer	Fills a job vacancy or position.	Offers a salary plus benefit package.

Selection is a very important process which requires planning and objectivity. According to Cole (2002), the salient features of the selection process are:

- (a) The application details (forms, CVs and letters)
- (b) The interview, and
- (c) Selection tests, where applicable, and other supporting evidence, such as references.

The relationship between these features is as shown below.

Fig I Selection Process



Source: Adapted from G.A. Cole (2002) Salient features of the selection process

The key stages in the selection process are:

1. going through application forms or Curriculum Vitae (CVs)
2. drawing up a shortlist of candidates
3. inviting these candidates for interview
4. conducting interviews (supported by tests where appropriate)
5. making a decision about choice of candidates
6. making an attractive offer and confirming it
7. writing to unsuccessful candidates
8. notifying appropriate managers of decisions.

Applications sorting are divided into “clearly suitable”, “possible” and “unsuitable”. Clearly suitable applicants are called for interview, possible contenders

are held temporarily in reserve, while unsuitable applicants are rejected. If the number of candidates accepting the invitation for interview is disappointing, then some of the possible contenders may be invited. In the current economic climate, it is more likely that personnel departments will be overwhelmed with applications from prospective employees. In this situation, only two categories are likely to be used i.e. suitable and unsuitable (Cole, 2002).

One of the advantages of using application forms is that the information about candidates comes in a standardized format. Every applicant is more or less obliged to complete all sections of the form, and any omissions are fairly obvious. A well-designed application form should enable applicants to give a full and fair account of themselves, and thus be provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the vacancy in question. The application form can be used as the basis for the job interview since it is the fullest evidence about the candidate available prior to the interview.

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Curriculum Vitae is a candidate's own description of how he sees his personal history in relation to a job he is applying for. Most CVs are a combination of two elements, i.e. "standard/routine information about the candidate" and "personalized information". The first describes basic details such as:

- (a) Name, address, telephone number and e-mail address.
- (b) Age, marital status
- (c) Education: secondary school/college/university attended, etc.
- (d) Qualifications obtained: GCE 'O' and 'A' Levels certificates, diplomas and degrees.
- (e) Professional memberships, e.g. ACCA, NIM, IPM, CIS, etc.

The second element is a personalized view of such matters as the candidate's job history, personal interests and motivation. Thus the candidate may choose the order in which he describes previous experience, and can decide how much or how little to say about time in particular posts, or in developing particular interests. A candidate has the scope to elaborate on his experience.

In the final analysis, application forms and curriculum vitae (VCs) are the core of the selection process. With them, candidates can be shortlisted, interviewed and assessed. For many posts the main selection is made on the basis of the application form and this is called phenomenon 'selecting out', which is referred to as 'pre-selection'. It should be noted that "as economic conditions mean that more and more people will be chasing fewer and fewer jobs, the existence of an unmanageably large pool of applicants will become much more common." One response to this situation by

employers is to set out pre-selection on a systematic basis. Thus, “The information on the application form becomes the essential data for pre-selection decision.” (Aibieyi, 2010)

References

References are brief statements about a candidate made by a third party, usually the candidate’s superior. These statements are mainly intended to provide confirmation of information supplied by an applicant on his/her application form. Referees are usually asked to provide factual information about the candidate’s period of employment in their organization, and evidence concerning the candidate’s personal character (honesty, reliability, etc.). Most public-sector organizations take up references before short-listed candidates are called for interview; private sector organizations tend to take them up after the candidate has been interviewed and a provisional offer of appointment made (Cole, 2002). References are in most cases a mere formality. The most likely reasons for their continuing inclusion in the selection process is that they encourage applicants to tell the truth about themselves in their application forms and they provide a kind of “reference point” in cases of applicants’ attempt to mislead prospective employers.

To improve on the use of referee’s report, it is recommended that:

1. Reference letters be required from only candidates who are short-listed for interview.
2. The applicant should nominate at least four referees from which the prospective employer could select three and ask for references.
3. One of the referees, whether nominated by the applicant or not, should be the present or previous employer.

It should be noted that reference letters or information are not usually a permanent part of the employee’s record if hired.

Selection Interview/Test

Interview means a formal meeting of employers (interview panel) and applicants at which the applicants are asked questions to see if they are suitable for a particular job. If the application form is the core feature of the first stage of the selection process, then the interview is its counterpart in the second stage. Interview is a formal exchange of facts, impressions and viewpoints between a prospective employer and a prospective employee with a view to their mutual selection or parting. Usually, only one applicant is interviewed at a time, but the number of interviewers may vary considerably. The most common options are as follows:

1. one interviewer
2. two interviewers (e.g. one line manager and a personnel officer)
3. a panel of interviewers (e.g. four interviewers and a chairman).

The greater the number of interviewers at any one time, the greater the formality. Panel interviews are favoured in the public sector, where they are thought to enable all the organizational interests concerned to play a part in the proceedings and to see that justice is done. Most candidates appear to find panel interviews rather daunting. When more than one interviewer is present it is important to agree on the allocation of questions beforehand, so far as possible. In a two-to-one situation, there is an advantage to the selectors in that whilst one person is asking a question, or pursuing a point, the other can observe the candidate's responses.

The interviews held in the majority of organizations are conducted by people who are amateurs in the role of interviewer. The typical manager and supervisor in an organisation simply does not have the opportunity to exercise his or her skills with any frequency, and may have received little or no training in the requisite skills. The test of reliability is usually the degree of agreement between different interviewers about a set of candidates. If several interviewers come to distinctly different conclusions about a list of candidates, the reliability of the system is low, and vice versa. The test of validity is the extent to which the interview can predict suitability for the job. Thus, if a number of appointees turn out to be unsuitable in their first few weeks, the validity of the selection exercise must be questioned. It has also been learnt that where selection criteria are employed in a structured way in an interview, reliability and validity are increased. This suggests that if interviewers make full use of the application form and the personnel specification to provide a framework for the interview process, there will be greater reliability in selecting the "right candidate". As in any worthwhile task, the more thorough the preparation, the better the chance of completing it successfully. This suggests that

- The interviewer should possess and have read all the relevant documents (job description, personnel specification, application form and other material such as references).
- The interviewer should establish what precise issues he/she needs to draw out in the interview.
- The interviewer should prepare crucial questions and comments to put to the candidate.
- The candidate should be given every opportunity to give a full and fair account of him/her self.
- The interviewer should nevertheless be in control of the situation.
- The interviewer should be aware of his/her own prejudices and needs.

Where interviewers prepare themselves along the line suggested, they are more likely to reach informed judgments about candidates. Some organizations encourage

their line managers to formalize this process of structuring the interview by asking them to complete a candidate assessment form, which is usually based on the personnel specification.

It is useful at this stage to consider the skills to be adopted at the interview. The skills required are – the ability to prepare adequately; ability to listen, including picking up points implied in the candidates' responses; questioning skills – the ability to ask relevant questions at the right time. Other skills include - ability to analyze the picture of the candidate that is emerging during the interview; ability to summarize and make notes on the candidate's performance; ability to supply relevant information to the candidate without boring him/her. Skill in building and maintaining a relationship with the candidate (rapport) and ability to control the interview with tact, diplomacy and firmness are also very important. The following discussion on skill requirements therefore becomes very imperative in interview process.

1. **Listening** – Basically, listening requires people to give their undivided attention to candidate. Interviewers usually demonstrate that they are listening by (a) looking at the candidate, (b) nodding the head, (c) making verbal signs (Uh, uh!, 'Yes', 'umm') and (d) asking follow-up questions or making follow-up comments.
2. **Questioning** – Unlike listening which is an essentially passive behaviour, questioning is active. Through questioning an interviewer can select the issues he wants to cover, can elicit relevant information and can control the pace and direction of the interview.
3. **Analysing and Summarising** – It is important that interviewers should be able to make sense of what the candidate is telling them, build up a picture of the candidate and identify any significant blanks in the overall information. Clearly, it is easier to carry out this analysis if you possess a clear idea of what you as interviewer are looking for.
4. **Rapport** – Any face-to-face encounter poses a challenge to a manager. In an interview situation, it is essential to get the candidate talking, and this means putting him or her at ease first. Good eye-contact, encouraging facial expressions and comments all help to make a candidate feel that this is a constructive and enjoyable experience.
5. **Control** – An interview is a costly and time-consuming business. It is important that the time available should not be wasted. Tactful control of the situation avoids this pitfall. Interviewers need to be able to interrupt, stop or re-direct the

candidate, if necessary, and be polite and firm. Control is maintained primarily by means of questions and interjections.

- 6. At the end of an Interview, it is Important that the Candidate is Thanked for His or Her Interest and Response.** Each candidate has invested a good deal of personal effort in the selection process, and if this point is acknowledged, it is usually appreciated. Part of the diplomacy involved here is related to the 'company image' aspects of recruitment.

It is imperative to note that at the end of an interview is a decision about the best candidate for the post in question. Where a panel has been involved, the members discuss all the candidates between them and arrive at either a unanimous or a majority decision. Where interviewers have seen candidates separately, they confer afterwards and agree on their choice. If a sufficiently strong candidate has not been forthcoming, the decision will be 'not to appoint', but to re-advertise or take other steps. As in other aspects of human life, the ideal person rarely exists, and most selection decisions are a question of agreeing on the best available candidate in the circumstances. Successful selection interview is not easy, but generally it is possible for managers and others to improve their skills in this aspect of their work. By practicing the skills involved and by developing systematic procedures, much of the arbitrariness can be excluded from the situation. An example of a guide to good practice in selection interview is provided below:

- (a) **Be Prepared** – Obtain available information, e.g. job details, candidate specification and application form. Arrange interview room. Ensure no interruptions. Plan the interview.
- (b) **Welcome the Candidate** - After initial courtesies, thank candidate for coming. Explain briefly what procedure you propose to adopt for the interview. Commence by asking relatively easy and non-threatening question.
- (c) **Encourage Candidate to Talk** - Ask open-ended question. Prompt where necessary. Indicate that you are listening. Briefly develop points of interest raised by candidate.
- (d) **Control the Interview** – Direct your questions along the lines that will achieve your objectives. Tactfully, but firmly, clamp down on the over-talkative candidate. Do not get too involved in particular issues just because of your own interests. Keep an eye on the time.

- (e) **Supply Necessary Information** – Briefly add to information already made available to candidate. Answer candidates questions. Inform candidate of the next steps in the selection procedure.
- (f) **Close Interview** – Thank candidate for his responses to your questions. Exchange final courtesies.
- (g) **Write up your Notes about the Candidate.** Grade, or rank him/her for suitability. Operate administrative procedures regarding notification, etc.

Tests

Test is an examination of somebody's knowledge or ability, consisting of questions for them to answer or activities for them to carry out, i.e. an IQ – Intelligence/aptitude test. Tests are used as an aid in selection. One of the major advantages of the use of tests is that many tests help in making decisions that are objective and less biased than other devices that are used in the selection process. It is easier to show an applicant his score on the examination than to explain to him that the panel did not like how he answered questions during an interview (Aibieyi, 2010).

Qualities of Good Tests

There are various qualities of good tests which include validity of tests, reliability and so on.

(1) Validity of Tests

A test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what it was designed to measure.

(2) Reliability

A good test is reliable. A test is reliable if it is consistent in its measuring ability. A reliable test gives consistent results. If an applicant takes the test now and repeats it few weeks after, the score obtained are not expected to vary a great deal. Different tests measure different traits or skills. The major types of test are:

- (3) **General Ability Test:** Measures mental ability. It measures a person's general training and education.
- (4) **Intelligence Test:** Measures mental ability, number aptitude, spatial reasoning and perceptual speed. The Otis Quick – scoring mental ability test is a typical example.
- (5) **Aptitude Test:** Measures a person's ability to learn and adapt to a job position.

- (5) **Skill Test:** Determines a person's ability to use specific skills.
- (7) **Interest Tests:** Measures a person's preference for some activities to others.
- (8) **Personality Test:** Measures a person's personal traits including emotional beliefs and dominance (Aibieyi, 2009)

The following conditions are important for the effective use of tests:

1. Tests should be weighted in the context of the applicant's employment tests.
2. Make sure that test is right for the job in question.
3. Beware of the differences in what different tests try to measure.
4. Use tests that have both general and specific norms.
5. Try the test on present employees before adopting it.
6. Use tests that have as high a selection ratio as possible.
7. Seek advice of consultants in test selection.

In all selection interviews, it is important that the interviewer should collect as much information as possible about the applicant in order to decide whether a job offer could be made to him or not. The interviewer must be given enough information to enable him decide whether to accept the offer of employment when made to him or not. During the interview, it is important for management to concentrate on employee's past work experience and performance. It is from these that his potential could be assessed. Another key point that could arise is to determine whether the new employee would fit into the organization or not. Every employee influences and is influenced by people in the organization to which he is a part.

Interview by Technique

In this method there are two major interviewing patterns

- (a) **Patterned Interview:** A pattern or structured interview technique is a very structured and very well planned one. This pattern lends itself to the use of a detailed check-list of items that probe the applicant's background and on other issues believed to be crucial and essential by the organisation. One of the advantages of a structured interview is that the interviewer is always in control. The same question is asked of all the applicants and this helps to give some objectivity and consistency. Time is saved as only important questions are asked. This interviewing method is very easy to use so that those who are not very skilled in interviewing could successfully interview applicants.

(b) Non-Directive Interview:- As the name suggests, the interviewee is in control. The interviewer is careful not to influence the applicant's remarks. Open ended questions are asked and the interviewer only interferes to keep the conversation going on with suitable remarks.

For a successful interview, the following Do's and Don'ts should be noted –

1. Always put the applicant at ease – a comfortable chair and handshake are prerequisites if it is a stress interview that is contemplated.
2. Listen to the interviewer and avoid undue interruption.
3. Remain neutral. Do not offer your opinion of reaction until at the end of the interview.
4. Avoid the halo effect – do not be carried away by personal bias or prejudice.
5. Avoid rushing. This gives a very poor image of the organisation and gives evidence of lack of preparedness.

Physical Examination

It is common practice for organizations to require that prospective employees subject themselves to physical examination before a job offer is made. Usually, the organisation's medical doctor examines prospective employees in order to determine their health status and fitness for employment.

Offer of Appointment

The offer of employment is the accumulation of all the events that have originated from the identification of positions for employment to reference checks. This is perhaps the most important step in the selection process. Each factor in the process is to be weighed in the light of the circumstance. Many factors such as what weight to assign to lack of required experience on the same job, test scores, letters from referees and performance at the interview, are to be considered. The prevailing wage, and the personal needs and aspirations of the applicants should also be considered.

When the decision is made to hire the individuals, they should be written to as soon as possible. Applicants appreciate prompt action from employers. All employees when they receive letters of appointment should be given a time limit to accept the offer after which the offer lapses. Applicants who were not offered employment should be so advised; it makes for good public relations. The job offer should not be too brief. It should state as clearly as possible (1) the position offered to the employee, (2) the salary attached to the position and (3) working arrangements. Other pertinent information that cannot be in the letter should be communicated to him during the induction period.

Conclusion

The essence of adhering to the organizational procedure, rules and regulations; and the application of merit principles in the process of selecting applicants for employment cannot be over-emphasized. Most organizations fail to achieve their goals due to lack of adequate or qualified staff for various positions. Staff selection process and interview techniques have been considered to be very imperative in every organization that operates to achieve some goals and objectives. This is so because human resource is an important factor of production and without having the right employees, there is no way the objectives of the organization can be actualized.

The reason for following strictly, every step in staff selection process is to ensure that the right persons are engaged in the organization. This paper has therefore examined and analysed the various stages and steps in staff selection process. This includes the various interview techniques, the merit system, and selection tests required to bring about the right person in the right position in every organization.

It is therefore concluded that the application of merit principles, appropriate interview techniques and adherence to the organizational staff selection process is very vital in selecting the right people for the right positions in every organization.

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