RECRUITMENT

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER ARE TO:

1 IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION TO TAKE WHEN AN EMPLOYEE LEAVES AN ORGANISATION

2 EXPLAIN THE ROLE PLAYED BY JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PERSON SPECIFICATIONS IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

3 COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE MAJOR ALTERNATIVE RECRUITMENT METHODS

4 ASSESS DEVELOPMENTS IN RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING AND INTERNET RECRUITMENT

5 INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

6 CLARIFY THE NEED FOR CONTROL AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES IN RECRUITMENT

7 ASSESS DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SHORTLISTING

There is always a need for replacement employees and those with unfamiliar skills that business growth makes necessary. Recruitment is also an area in which there are important social and legal implications, but perhaps most important is the significant part played in the lives of individual men and women by their personal experience of recruitment and the failure to be recruited. Virtually everyone reading these pages will know how significant those experiences have been in their own lives.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

On graduating from university, Howard was employed as a management trainee by a large bank and was soon assigned to taking part in interviews of prospective graduate recruits, which he found interesting and a boost to his ego. After two years in the bank a programme of reorganisation led to Howard being out of a job. It was seven months before he was employed again and he had undergone many disappointments and frustrations. His new post was again in recruitment and he wrote himself a short homily on a postcard which he kept propped up on his desk. It said:

- When you turn someone down, remember:
  - First, what the experience of rejection can do to a person.
  - Second, that the rejected person may be a customer.
  - Third, you may want to recruit that person later.

Over three million people are recruited by employers in the UK each year. It can be a costly and difficult process when skills are in short supply and labour markets are tight. In such circumstances the employer needs to 'sell' its jobs to potential employees so as to ensure that it can generate an adequate pool of applicants. According to Barber (1998) it is important that employers do not consider the recruitment process to be finished at this point. It continues during the shortlisting and interviewing stages and is only complete when an offer is made and accepted. Until that time there is an ongoing need to ensure that a favourable impression of the organisation as an employer is maintained in the minds of those whose services it wishes to secure.

DETERMINING THE VACANCY

Is there a vacancy? Is it to be filled by a newly recruited employee? These are the first questions to be answered in recruitment. Potential vacancies occur either through someone leaving or as a result of expansion. When a person leaves, there is no more than a prima facie case for filling the vacancy thus caused. There may be other ways of filling the gap. Vacancies caused by expansion may be real or imagined. The desperately pressing need of an executive for an assistant may be a plea more for recognition than for assistance. The creation of a new post to deal with a specialist activity

may be more appropriately handled by contracting that activity out to a supplier. Recruiting a new employee may be the most obvious tactic when a vacancy occurs, but it is not necessarily the most appropriate. Listed below are some of the options, several of which we discussed in Chapters 4 and 5:

- Reorganise the work
- Use overtime
- Mechanise the work
- Stagger the hours
- Make the job part time
- Subcontract the work
- Use an agency

ACTIVITY 6.1

Can you think of further ways of avoiding filling a vacancy by recruiting a new employee? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the methods you have thought of? For what types of job with which you are familiar would each of your methods, and those listed above, be most appropriate?

If your decision is that you are going to recruit, there are four questions to determine the vacancy:

1 What does the job consist of?
2 In what way is it to be different from the job done by the previous incumbent?
3 What are the aspects of the job that specify the type of candidate?
4 What are the key aspects of the job that the ideal candidate wants to know before deciding to apply?

The conventional HR approach to these questions is to produce job descriptions and personnel specifications. Methods of doing this are well established. Good accounts are provided by Pearn and Kandola (1988), Brannick and Levine (2002) and IRS (2003a). The approach involves breaking the job down into its component parts, working out what its chief objectives will be and then recording this on paper. A person specification listing the key attributes required to undertake the role can then be derived from the job description and used in recruiting the new person. An example of a job description is given in Figure 6.1.

An alternative approach which allows for more flexibility is to dispense with the job description and to draw up a person specification using other criteria. One way of achieving this is to focus on the characteristics or competences of current job holders who are judged to be excellent performers. Instead of asking 'What attributes are necessary to undertake this role?' this second method involves asking 'What attributes are shared by the people who have performed best in the role?' According to some (for example Whiddett and Kandola 2000), the disadvantage of the latter
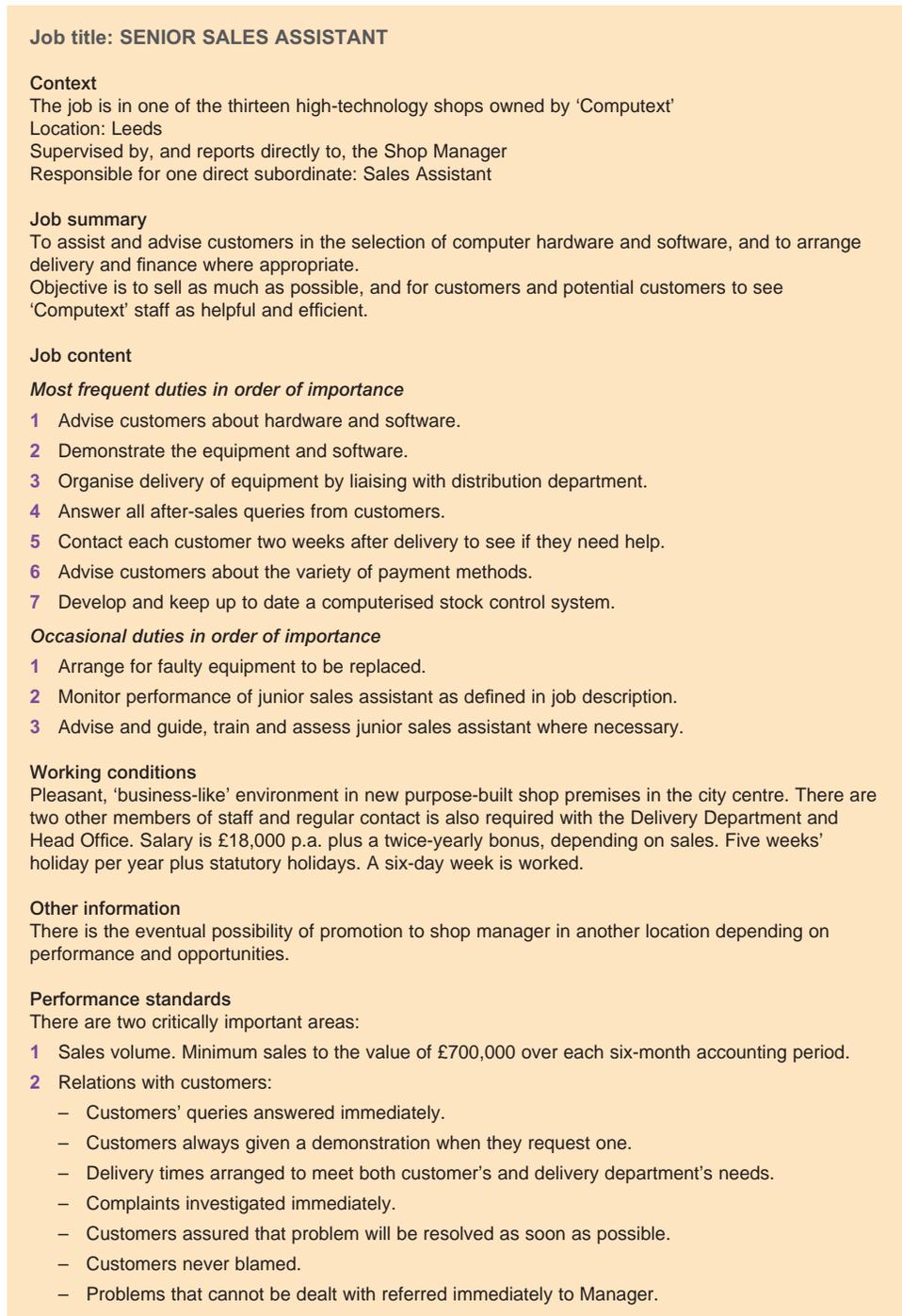
Job title: SENIOR SALES ASSISTANT

Context
The job is in one of the thirteen high-technology shops owned by 'Computext'
Location: Leeds
Supervised by, and reports directly to, the Shop Manager
Responsible for one direct subordinate: Sales Assistant

Job summary
To assist and advise customers in the selection of computer hardware and software, and to arrange delivery and finance where appropriate.
Objective is to sell as much as possible, and for customers and potential customers to see 'Computext' staff as helpful and efficient.

Job content

Most frequent duties in order of importance

1   Advise customers about hardware and software.

2   Demonstrate the equipment and software.

3   Organise delivery of equipment by liaising with distribution department.

4   Answer all after-sales queries from customers.

5   Contact each customer two weeks after delivery to see if they need help.

6   Advise customers about the variety of payment methods.

7   Develop and keep up to date a computerised stock control system.

Occasional duties in order of importance

1   Arrange for faulty equipment to be replaced.

2   Monitor performance of junior sales assistant as defined in job description.

3   Advise and guide, train and assess junior sales assistant where necessary.

Working conditions
Pleasant, 'business-like' environment in new purpose-built shop premises in the city centre. There are two other members of staff and regular contact is also required with the Delivery Department and Head Office. Salary is £18,000 p.a. plus a twice-yearly bonus, depending on sales. Five weeks' holiday per year plus statutory holidays. A six-day week is worked.

Other information
There is the eventual possibility of promotion to shop manager in another location depending on performance and opportunities.

Performance standards
There are two critically important areas:

1   Sales volume. Minimum sales to the value of £700,000 over each six-month accounting period.

2   Relations with customers:

–   Customers' queries answered immediately.

–   Customers always given a demonstration when they request one.

–   Delivery times arranged to meet both customer's and delivery department's needs.

–   Complaints investigated immediately.

–   Customers assured that problem will be resolved as soon as possible.

–   Customers never blamed.

–   Problems that cannot be dealt with referred immediately to Manager.

Figure 6.1
Job description for a senior sales assistant

approach is that it tends to produce employees who are very similar to one another and who address problems with the same basic mindset (corporate clones). Where innovation and creativity are wanted it helps to recruit people with more diverse characteristics.

INTERNAL RECRUITMENT

Vacancies, of course, are often filled internally. Sometimes organisations advertise all vacancies publicly as a matter of course and consider internal candidates along with anyone from outside the organisation who applies. This approach is generally considered to constitute good practice and is widely used in the UK's public sector. However, many organisations prefer to invite applications from internal candidates *before* they look to their external labour markets for new staff (Newell and Shackleton 2000, pp. 116–17; CIPD 2003, p. 11). There are considerable advantages from the employer's perspective. First it is a great deal less expensive to recruit internally, there being no need to spend money on job advertisements or recruitment agencies. Instead a message can simply be placed in a company newsletter or posted on its intranet or staff noticeboards. Further cost savings and efficiency gains can be made because internal recruits are typically able to take up new posts much more quickly than people being brought in from outside. Even if they have to work some notice in their current positions, they are often able to take on some of their new responsibilities or undergo relevant training at the same time. The other advantage stems from the fact that internal candidates, as a rule, are more knowledgeable than new starters coming in from other organisations about what exactly the job involves. They are also more familiar with the organisation's culture, rules and geography, and so take less time to settle into their new jobs and to begin working at full capacity.

Giving preference to internal recruits, particularly as far as promotions are concerned, has the great advantage of providing existing employees with an incentive to work hard, demonstrate their commitment and stay with the organisation when they might otherwise consider looking for alternative employment. The practice provides a powerful signal from management to show that existing employees are valued and that attractive career development opportunities are available to them. Failing to recruit internally may thus serve to put off good candidates with potential from applying for the more junior positions in an organisation.

The main disadvantage of only advertising posts internally stems from the limited field of candidates that it permits an organisation to consider. While it may mean that someone who 'fits in well' is recruited, it may also very well mean that the best available candidate is not even considered. Over the long term the organisation can thus end up being less well served than it would have been had internal candidates been required to compete with outside people for their posts. For this reason internal recruitment sits uneasily with a commitment to equal opportunities and to the creation of a diverse workforce. Talented candidates from under-represented groups are not appointed because they never get to know about the vacancies that the organisation has.

It is also important to note that the management of internal recruitment practices is difficult to carry out effectively in practice. Research carried out by the Institute of Employment Studies (2002) shows that serious problems often occur when internal candidates fail to be selected. This is because they tend to enter the selection process with higher expectations of being offered the position than is the case with external candidates. Bitterness, antipathy and low morale are thus likely to follow. Moreover, failed internal candidates are considerably more likely to pursue claims of unfair discrimination following a selection process than external candidates. For these reasons it is essential that great care is taken when managing internal recruitment to ensure

that the approach taken is both fair and seen to be fair. Giving honest, full, accurate and constructive feedback to failed candidates is an essential part of the process.

METHODS OF RECRUITMENT

Once an employer has decided that external recruitment is necessary, a cost-effective and appropriate method of recruitment must be selected. There are a number of distinct approaches to choose from, each of which is more or less appropriate in different circumstances. As a result most employers use a wide variety of different recruitment methods at different times. In many situations there is also a good case for using different methods in combination when looking to fill the same vacancy. Table 6.1 sets out the usage of different methods reported in a recent CIPD survey of 557 UK employers (CIPD 2003).

It is interesting to compare the figures in Table 6.1 with those reported in surveys of how people actually find their jobs in practice. These repeatedly show that informal methods (such as word of mouth and making unsolicited applications) are as common as, if not more common than, formal methods such as recruitment advertising. In 2002, the Labour Force Survey asked over a million people how they had obtained their current job. The results are shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.1 Usage of various methods of recruitment by 557 organisations in 2003

Advertisements in local press	84%	Recruiting temporary employees	43%
Specialist journals and trade press	73%	Executive recruitment consultants	41%
Corporate website	72%	Promotional events/careers fairs	37%
Recruitment agencies	71%	Apprentices/work placements	34%
National newspaper advertisements	64%	Speculative applications	34%
Internal intranet	61%	Secondments	32%
Word of mouth	58%	Commercial job-board internet sites	15%
Job Centres/Employment Service	46%	Radio/TV	14%
Education liaison	45%	Posters/billboards	13%

Source: Table compiled from data in CIPD (2003) *Recruitment and Selection Survey*. London: CIPD.

	Men	Women
Hearing from someone who worked there	30%	25%
Reply to an advertisement	25%	31%
Direct application	14%	17%
Private employment agency	10%	10%
Job centre	9%	8%
Other	12%	9%

Table 6.2 Methods of obtaining a job

Source: Labour Market Trends (2002), 'Labour market spotlight', *Labour Market Trends*, August.

THE RECRUITMENT METHODS COMPARED

All the various methods of recruitment have benefits and drawbacks, and the choice of a method has to be made in relation to the particular vacancy and the type of labour market in which the job falls. A general review of advantages and drawbacks is given in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Advantages and drawbacks of different methods of recruitment

Job centres

Advantages: (a) Applicants can be selected from nationwide sources with convenient, local availability of computer-based data.
(b) Socially responsible and secure.
(c) Can produce applicants very quickly.
(d) Free service for employers.

Drawbacks: (a) Registers are mainly of the unemployed rather than of the employed seeking a change.
(b) Produces people for interview who are not genuinely interested in undertaking the job.

Commercial employment agencies and recruitment consultancies

Advantages: (a) Established as the normal method for filling certain vacancies, e.g. secretaries in London.
(b) Little administrative chore for the employer.

Drawbacks: (a) Can produce staff who are likely to stay only a short time.
(b) Widely distrusted by employers.
(c) Can be very expensive.

Management selection consultants

Advantages: (a) Opportunity to elicit applicants anonymously.
(b) Opportunity to use expertise of consultant in an area where employer will not be regularly in the market.

Drawbacks: (a) Internal applicants may feel, or be, excluded.
(b) Cost.

Executive search consultants ('headhunters')

Advantages: (a) Known individuals can be approached directly.
(b) Useful if employer has no previous experience in specialist field.
(c) Recruiting from, or for, an overseas location.

Drawbacks: (a) Cost.
(b) Potential candidates outside the headhunter's network are excluded.
(c) Recruits remain on the consultant's list and can be hunted again.

Visiting universities

Advantages: (a) The main source of new graduates from universities.
(b) Rated by students as the most popular method.

Drawbacks: (a) Need to differentiate presentations from those of other employers.
(b) Time taken to visit a number of universities (i.e. labour intensive).

Schools and the Careers Service

Advantages: (a) Can produce a regular annual flow of interested enquirers.
(b) Very appropriate for the recruitment of school-leavers, who seldom look further than the immediate locality for their first employment.

Drawbacks: (a) Schools and the advisers are more interested in occupations than organisations.
(b) Taps into a limited potential applicant pool.

ACTIVITY 6.2

We have seen the significance of informal methods of recruitment whereby new employees come as a result of hearing about a vacancy from friends, or putting their names down for consideration when a vacancy occurs. Employees starting employment in this way present the employer with certain advantages as they come knowing that they were not wooed by the employer: the initiative was theirs. Also they will probably have some contacts in the company already that will help them to settle and cope with the induction crisis.

What are the drawbacks of this type of arrangement?

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING

In order to assist them in drafting advertisements and placing them in suitable media, many employers deal with a recruitment advertising agency. Such agencies provide expert advice on where to place advertisements and how they should be worded and will design them attractively to achieve maximum impact. Large organisations often subcontract all their advertising work to an agency with whom a mutually acceptable service-level agreement has been signed.

Recruitment advertising companies (as opposed to headhunters and recruitment consultants) are often inexpensive because the agency derives much of its income from the commission paid by the journals on the value of the advertising space sold, the bigger agencies being able to negotiate substantial discounts because of the amount of business they place with the newspapers and trade journals. A portion of this saving is then passed on to the employer so that it can easily be cheaper *and* a great deal more effective to work with an agent providing this kind of service. The HR manager placing, say, £50,000 of business annually with an agency will appreciate that the agency's income from that will be between £5,000 and £7,500, and will expect a good standard of service. The important questions relate to the experience of the agency in dealing with recruitment, as compared with other types of advertising, the quality of the advice they can offer about media choice and the quality of response that their advertisements produce.

In choosing where to place a recruitment advertisement the aim is to attract as many people as possible with the required skills and qualifications. You also want to reach people who are either actively looking for a new job or thinking about doing so. The need is therefore to place the advertisement where job seekers who are qualified to take on the role are most likely to look. Except in very tight labour markets, where large numbers of staff are required at the same time, there is no point in placing a recruitment advertisement outside a newspaper or journal's recruitment pages. In some situations newspaper readership figures are helpful when deciding where to advertise. An example would be where there are two or more established trade journals or local newspapers competing with one another, both of which carry extensive numbers of recruitment advertisements. Otherwise readership figures are

unimportant because people tend to buy different newspapers when job searching than they do the rest of the time. It is often more helpful to look at the share of different recruitment advertising markets achieved by the various publications, as this gives an indication of where particular types of job are mostly advertised. In the UK in recent years the *Guardian* newspaper has gained and sustained a 40 per cent market share of national recruitment advertising. For many jobs in the media, education and the public sector it is now established as the first port of call for job seekers. This has been achieved by cutting rates to less than half those charged by other national newspapers. For the more senior private sector jobs, however, the established market leaders are the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Financial Times*. While recruitment advertising agents are well placed to advise on these issues, it is straightforward to get hold of information about rates charged by different publications and their respective market shares. Good starting points are the websites of British Rate and Data (www.brad.co.uk), which carries up-to-date information about thousands of publications, and the National Readership Survey (www.nrs.co.uk) which provides details of readership levels among different population groups. Table 6.4 reviews the advantages and drawbacks of various methods of job advertising.

Drafting the advertisement

The decision on what to include in a recruitment advertisement is important because of the high cost of space and the need to attract attention; both factors will encourage the use of the fewest number of words. Where agencies are used they will be able to advise on this, as they will on the way the advertisement should be worded, but the following is a short checklist of items that must be included.

- Name and brief details of employing organisation
- Job role and duties
- Training to be provided
- Key points of the personnel specification or competency profile
- Salary
- Instructions about how to apply

Many employers are coy about declaring the salary that will accompany the advertised post. Sometimes this is reasonable as the salary scales are well known and inflexible, as in much public sector employment. Elsewhere the coyness is due either to the fact that the employer has a general secrecy policy about salaries and does not want to publicise the salary of a position to be filled for fear of dissatisfying holders of other posts, or does not know what to offer and is waiting to see 'what the mail brings'. All research evidence, however, suggests that a good indication of the salary is essential if the employer is to attract a useful number of appropriate replies (*see* Barber 1998, pp. 42–3).

Table 6.4 The advantages and drawbacks of various methods of job advertising

Internal advertisement

Advantages: (a) Maximum information to all employees, who might then act as recruiters.
          (b) Opportunity for all internal candidates to apply.
          (c) If an internal candidate is appointed, there is a shorter induction period.
          (d) Speed.
          (e) Cost.

Drawbacks: (a) Limit to number of applicants.
         (b) Internal candidates not matched against those from outside.
         (c) May be unlawful if indirect discrimination. (*See* Chapter 23.)

Vacancy lists outside premises

Advantage: (a) Economical way of advertising, particularly if premises are near a busy thoroughfare.

Drawbacks: (a) Vacancy list likely to be seen by few people.
         (b) Usually possible to put only barest information, like the job title, or even just 'Vacancies'.

Advertising in the national press

Advantages: (a) Advertisement reaches large numbers.
          (b) Some national newspapers are the accepted medium for search by those seeking particular posts.

Drawbacks: (a) Cost.
         (b) Much of the cost 'wasted' in reaching inappropriate people.

Advertising in the local press

Advantages: (a) Recruitment advertisements more likely to be read by those seeking local employment.
          (b) Little 'wasted' circulation.

Drawback: (a) Local newspapers appear not to be used by professional and technical people seeking vacancies.

Advertising in the technical press

Advantage: (a) Reaches a specific population with minimum waste.

Drawbacks: (a) Relatively infrequent publication may require advertising copy six weeks before appearance of advertisement.
         (b) Inappropriate when a non-specialist is needed, or where the specialism has a choice of professional publications.

Internet

Advantages: (a) Information about a vacancy reaches many people.
          (b) Inexpensive once a website has been constructed.
          (c) Speed with which applications are sent in.
          (d) Facilitates online shortlisting.

Drawbacks: (a) Can produce thousands of unsuitable applications.
         (b) Worries about confidentiality may deter good applications.

ACTIVITY 6.3

Table 6.5 contains phrases about the value in pay terms of 12 different jobs. Try putting them in rank order of actual cash value to the recipient. Then ask a friend to do the same thing and compare your lists.

Table 6.5 Phrases from a quality newspaper about salary

1	*c.*£60,000 + bonus + car + benefits
2	from *c.*£35k
3	£30,000–£40,000 + substantial bonus + car
4	You will already be on a basic annual salary of not less than £40,000
5	Six-figure remuneration + profit share + benefits
6	*c.*£60,000 package
7	Attractive package
8	Substantial package
9	£50,000 OTE, plus car and substantial benefits
10	£ excellent + benefits
11	£ Neg.
12	*c.*£60k package + banking benefits

E-RECRUITMENT

The use of the internet for recruitment purposes is undoubtedly the most striking recent development in the field, but its practical significance remains a question of debate. When the internet first became widely used a decade ago it was often predicted that it would revolutionise the recruitment industry. In the future, it was argued, most of us would find out about jobs through web searches. It now appears that these predictions greatly overstated the influence that the internet would have. Incomes Data Services (2003) came to the following conclusion having carried out an extensive survey of approaches used by UK organisations:

> While advertising on the Internet is fairly common – many organisations now place vacancies on their own websites and make use of third party job boards – among the employers featured in this study this is clearly seen as complementary to, rather than replacing traditional advertising media. Placing advertisements in local and national newspapers and in the trade press continues to be the most important way for many companies to reach potential applicants. IDS (2003, p. 1)

Internet recruitment takes two basic forms. The first is centred on the employer's own website, jobs being advertised alongside information about the products and services offered by the organisation. The second approach makes use of the growing number of cyber-agencies which combine the roles traditionally played by both newspapers and employment agents. They advertise the job and undertake shortlisting before sending on a selection of suitable CVs to the employer.

For employers the principal attraction is the way that the internet allows jobs to be advertised inexpensively to a potential audience of millions. According to Frankland (2000) the cost of setting up a good website is roughly equivalent to that associated with advertising a single high-profile job in a national newspaper. Huge savings can also be made by dispensing with the need to print glossy recruitment brochures and other documents to send to potential candidates. The other big advantage is speed. People can respond within seconds of reading about an

opportunity by emailing their CV to the employer. Shortlisting can also be under-taken quickly with the use of CV-matching software or online application forms.

In principle e-recruitment thus has a great deal to offer. In practice, however, there are major problems which may take many years to iron out. A key drawback is the way that employers advertising jobs tend to get bombarded with hundreds of applica-tions. This occurs because of the large number of people who read the advertise-ment and because it takes so little effort to email a copy of a pre-prepared CV to the employer concerned. In order to prevent 'spamming' of this kind it is necessary to make use of online shortlisting software which is able to screen out unsuitable applications. Such technologies, however, are not wholly satisfactory. Those which work by looking for key words in CVs inevitably have a 'hit and miss' character and can be criticised for being inherently unfair. The possibility that good candidates may not be considered simply because they have not chosen a particular word or phrase is strong. The alternative is to require candidates to apply online by completing an application form or pschyometric test. This approach has the advantage of deterring candidates who are not prepared to invest the time and effort required to complete the forms, but is unreliable in important respects – there is no guarantee that the test is in fact being completed by the candidate, nor is it completed within a standard, pre-determined time limit. Other problems concern fears about security and confid-entiality which serve to deter people from submitting personal details over the web:

> Everybody should be familiar with the fear of using a credit card on-line even though good e-commerce sites have secure servers that enable these transactions to take place safely. The job-seeker's equivalent of this is 'how safe is it to put my CV on-line?' Although the figures prove that plenty of people have overcome this fear (there are an estimated 4.5 million CVs on-line), horror stories of candidates' CVs ending up on their employer's desktop aren't entirely without foundation. (Weekes 2000, p. 35)

Criticisms have also been made about poor standards of ethicality on the part of cyber-agencies. As with conventional employment agents there are a number who employ sharp practices such as posting fictional vacancies and falsely inflating advertised pay rates in order to build up a bank of CVs which can be circulated to employers on an unsolicited basis. Some cyber-agencies also copy CVs from com-petitors' sites and send them on to employers without authorisation. Over time, as the industry grows, professional standards will be established and a regulatory regime established, but for the time being such problems remain.

The fact that there are so many drawbacks alongside the advantages explains why so many employers appear to use the internet for recruitment while rating it relatively poorly. When asked to rank recruitment methods in terms of their effectiveness very few employers place the internet at the top of the list (7 per cent according to the 2003 CIPD survey). Established approaches such as newspaper advertising and education liaison are much more highly rated and are thus unlikely to be replaced by e-recruitment in the near future. However, over the longer term, technological developments and increased web usage may improve the effectiveness of e-recruitment considerably. This will occur when one or two very well-funded job sites emerge from the current mass and are able command substantial shares of the market. We will then have a situation in which anyone seeking a new job in a

particular field will make a familiar website rather than the newspaper or journal their first port of call.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

In 2000 an unemployed 53-year-old electronics manager called David Hall took part in a project commissioned by Wynnwith, an established recruitment company. He spent three months unsuccessfully looking for a job using the services of twelve well-known cyber-agencies. He registered with each, giving full details of his background and skills. At the end of the period he concluded that 'these sites appear to offer little more than pretty coloured graphics and empty promises about job opportunities'. He was offered one interview during the twelve weeks, for a role that was unsuitable given his experience. Of the hundreds of job opportunities emailed to him, he reckoned that only 5 per cent matched his capabilities. Among his criticisms were the following:

- the same jobs were advertised week after week
- very little information was provided about most vacancies
- salary levels were inflated to make jobs more appealing
- he received no feedback on applications that failed
- he was concerned that his CV was being circulated without his consent
- his emails were often not acknowledged

Source: 'Online Recruitment Study' at www.wynnwith.com.

EMPLOYER BRANDING

In recent years considerable interest has developed in the idea that employers have much to gain when competing for staff by borrowing techniques long used in marketing goods and services to potential customers. In particular, many organisations have sought to position themselves as 'employers of choice' in their labour markets with a view to attracting stronger applications from potential employees. Those who have succeeded have often found that their recruitment costs fall as a result because they get so many more unsolicited applications (*see* Taylor 2002, p. 449).

Central to these approaches is the development over time of a positive **'brand image'** of the organisation as an employer, so that potential employees come to regard working there as highly desirable. Developing a good brand image is an easier task for larger companies with household names than for those which are smaller or highly specialised, but the possibility of developing and sustaining a reputation as a good employer is something from which all organisations stand to benefit.

The key, as when branding consumer products, is to build on any aspect of the working experience that is distinct from that offered by other organisations competing in the same broad applicant pool. It may be relatively high pay or a generous benefits package, it may be flexible working, or a friendly and informal atmosphere, strong career development potential or job security. This is then developed as a 'unique selling proposition' and forms the basis of the employer branding exercise.

The best way of finding out what is distinct and positive about working in your organisation is to carry out some form of staff attitude survey. Employer branding exercises simply amount to a waste of time and money when they are not rooted in the actual lived experience of employees because people are attracted to the organisation on false premises. As with claims made for products that do not live up to their billing, the employees gained are not subsequently retained, and resources are wasted recruiting people who resign quickly after starting.

Once the unique selling propositions have been identified they can be used to inform all forms of communication that the organisation engages in with potential and actual applicants. The aim must be to repeat the message again and again in advertisements, in recruitment literature, on internet sites and at careers fairs. It is also important that existing employees are made aware of their employer's brand proposition too as so much recruitment is carried out informally through word of mouth. Provided the message is accurate and provided it is communicated effectively over time, the result will be a 'leveraging of the brand' as more and more people in the labour market begin to associate the message with the employer.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

Like many fast food chains, Burger King has found it hard to recruit mangers to run its restaurants. Such workplaces have a poor image in the labour market and lose out as a result in the recruitment of graduates and junior managerial staff, many of whom would prefer to work pretty well anywhere else. Burger King reversed its fortunes to a great extent during 2002 and 2003 by running a shrewd recruitment advertising campaign rooted in an employer branding exercise. The advertisements were strikingly designed and printed in colour to attract attention. A small corporate logo was featured in one corner, but this was dwarfed by slogans which set out what made working as a Burger King manager distinct. The focus was on the following:

- The fact that the job was never dull
- The career development opportunities that were available to ambitious people
- The relatively attractive salary package on offer

In the week after the first advertisement was placed in a local paper two hundred people phoned for further details leading to the appointment of eight new managers. The company's equivalent old-style advertisement had only yielded twenty applicants, none of whom were considered appointable.   Source: IRS (2003b).

CONTROL AND EVALUATION

The HR manager needs to monitor the effectiveness of advertising and all other methods of recruitment, first, to ensure value for money and, second, to ensure that the pool of applicants produced by the various methods is suitable.

Wright and Storey (1994, p. 209) suggest that information on the following should be collected:

1 Number of initial enquiries received which resulted in completed application forms.

2 Number of candidates at various stages in the recruitment and selection process, especially those shortlisted.

3 Number of candidates recruited.

4 Number of candidates retained in organisation after six months.

There is also a good case for monitoring the numbers of men and women who are successful at each stage of the process and the numbers of people from different ethnic minorities. Where an imbalance becomes apparent the organisation can then take remedial action.

There needs, however, to be more information than this in order to get to the more intangible questions, such as 'Did the best candidate not even apply?' The most important source of information about the quality of the recruitment process is the people involved in it. Do telephonists and receptionists know how to handle the tentative employment enquiry? What did they hear from applicants in the original enquiries that showed the nature of their reaction to the advertisement? Is it made simple for enquirers to check key points by telephone or personal visit? Is there an unnecessary emphasis on written applications before anything at all can be done? Useful information can also be obtained from both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Those who have been successful will obviously believe that recruitment was well done, while the unsuccessful may have good reason to believe that it was flawed. However, those who are unsuccessful sometimes ask for feedback on the reasons. If a recruiter is able to give this, it is also a simple development to ask the applicant for comment on the recruitment process.

CORRESPONDENCE

If an organisation is to maximise its chances of recruiting the best people to the jobs it advertises it must ensure that all subsequent communication with those who express an interest is carried out professionally. The same is true of casual enquirers and those who find out about possible vacancies informally through word of mouth. Failing to make a positive impression may well result in good candidates losing interest or developing a preference for a rival organisation which takes greater care to project itself effectively in its labour markets. Providing information to would-be candidates who express an interest is the first step. This is often seen as unnecessary and costly, but it should be seen as the organisation's opportunity to sell itself as an employer to its potential applicant pool. The following are commonly provided:

- a copy of the relevant job description and personnel specification;
- a copy of the advertisement for reference purposes;
- a copy of any general recruitment brochure produced by the organisation;
- the staff handbook or details of a collective agreement;
- details of any occupational pension arrangements;
- general information about the organisation (e.g. a mission statement, annual report or publicity brochures).

It is also essential to have some method of tracking recruitment, either manually or by computer, so that an immediate and helpful response can be given to applicants enquiring about the stage their application has reached. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that all applicants are informed about the outcome of their application. This will reduce the number of enquiries that have to be handled, but it is also an important aspect of public relations, as the organisation dealing with job applicants may also be dealing with prospective customers. Many people have the experience of applying for a post and then not hearing anything at all. Particularly when the application is unsolicited, HR managers may feel that there is no obligation to reply, but this could be bad business as well as disconcerting for the applicant. Standard letters ('I regret to inform you that there were many applications and yours was not successful . . .') are better than nothing, but letters containing actual information ('out of the seventy-two applications, we included yours in our first shortlist of fifteen, but not in our final shortlist of eight') are better. Best of all are the letters that make practical suggestions, such as applying again in six months' time, asking if the applicant would like to be considered for another post elsewhere in the organisation, or pointing out the difficulty of applying for a post that calls for greater experience or qualifications than the applicant at that stage is able to present.

ACTIVITY 6.4

Recruiters are interested in the job to be done, so that they concentrate on how the vacancy fits into the overall structure of the organisation and on the type of person to be sought. Applicants are interested in the work to be done, as they want to know what they will be doing and what the work will offer to them. Think of your own job and list both types of feature.

The job to be done

1 ....
2 ....
3 ....
4 ....
5 ....

The work that is offered

1 ....
2 ....
3 ....
4 ....
5 ....

How does your listing of features in the second list alter the wording of advertisements and other employment documentation?

SHORTLISTING

Shortlisting of candidates can be difficult in some instances because of small numbers of applicants and in other instances because of extremely large numbers of applicants. Such difficulties can arise unintentionally when there is inadequate specification of the criteria required or intentionally in large-scale recruitment exercises such as those associated with an annual intake of graduates.

In such circumstances it is tempting for the HR department to use some form of arbitrary method to reduce the numbers to a more manageable level. Examples include screening people out because of their age, because of their handwriting style or because their work history is perceived as being unconventional in some way. No doubt there are other whimsical criteria adopted by managers appalled at making sense of 100 or so application forms and assorted curricula vitae. Apart from those that are unlawful, these criteria are grossly unfair to applicants if not mentioned in the advertisement, and are a thoroughly unsatisfactory way of recruiting the most appropriate person.

It is far more satisfactory to have in place a fair and objective system for shortlisting candidates which produces the best group of alternative candidates to move forward to the interview stage. This can be achieved in one of three basic ways – which can be used separately or in combination. The first involves using a panel of managers to undertake shortlisting, reducing the likelihood that individual prejudices will influence the process. A number of distinct stages can be identified:

- **Stage 1:** Panel members agree essential criteria for those to be placed on the shortlist.

- **Stage 2:** Using those criteria, selectors individually produce personal lists of, say, ten candidates. An operating principle throughout is to concentrate on who can be included rather than who can be excluded, so that the process is positive, looking for strengths rather than shortcomings.

- **Stage 3:** Selectors reveal their lists and find their consensus. If stages 1 and 2 have been done properly the degree of consensus should be quite high and probably sufficient to constitute a shortlist for interview. If it is still not clear, they continue to:

- **Stage 4:** Discuss those candidates preferred by some but not all in order to clarify and reduce the areas of disagreement. A possible tactic is to classify candidates as 'strong', 'possible' or 'maverick'.

- **Stage 5:** Selectors produce a final shortlist by discussion, guarding against including compromise candidates: not strong, but offensive to no one.

The second approach involves employing a scoring system as advocated by Roberts (1997) and Wood and Payne (1998). As with the panel method, the key shortlisting criteria are defined at the start of the process (e.g. three years' management experience, a degree in a certain discipline, current salary in the range of £20,000–£30,000, evidence of an ability to drive change, etc.). The shortlister then scores each CV or application form received against these criteria awarding an A grade (or high mark) where clear evidence is provided that the candidate matches the criteria, a B grade where there is some evidence or where the candidate partially meets the criteria and a C grade where no convincing evidence is provided. Where a structured application form has been completed by the candidates, this process can

be undertaken quickly (two or three minutes per application) because a candidate can be screened out whenever, for example, more than one C grade has been awarded.

The third approach involves making use of the software systems on the market which shortlist candidates electronically. The different types of system and some of the drawbacks were described above in the section on e-recruitment. Despite the problems, such systems can be useful where the criteria are very clearly and tightly defined, and where an online application form is completed which makes use of multiple-choice answers. Such forms can be scored speedily and objectively, the candidate being given feedback on whether or not they have been successful. Only those who make the 'right' choices when completing the online questionnaire are then invited to participate in the next stage of the recruitment process.

SUMMARY PROPOSITIONS

6.1 Alternatives to filling a vacancy include reorganising the work; using overtime; mechanising the work; staggering the hours; making the job part time; subcontracting the work; using an employment agency.

6.2 Recent trends indicate a greater use by employers of recruitment agencies and executive consultants, open days, recruitment fairs, etc. Relocation constraints have also prompted a move towards the use of regional as opposed to national recruitment advertising.

6.3 Advertising agencies and specialist publications provide a wealth of information to ensure that advertisements reach the appropriate readership.

6.4 E-recruitment provides great potential advantages for employers but is not seen as being especially effective at present.

6.5 Employer branding involves actively selling the experience of working for an organisation by focusing on what makes the experience both positive and distinct.

6.6 Increasing the amount of information provided to potential applicants reduces the number of inappropriate applications.

6.7 Care with shortlisting increases the chances of being fair to all applicants and lessens the likelihood of calling inappropriate people for interview.

GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

1 What are the advantages and disadvantages of graduate recruitment fairs from an employer's point of view?

2 Why is it that the national newspapers which sell the fewest copies (broadsheets) dominate the market for recruitment advertising in the UK, while the more popular tabloids carry virtually none at all?

3 Can you improve on the suggestions for shortlisting that the chapter contains?

FURTHER READING

Barber, A.E. (1998) *Recruiting Employees: Individual and Organizational Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage

Taylor, S. and Collins, C. (2000) 'Organizational Recruitment: Enhancing the Intersection of Research and Practice', in C. Cooper and E. Locke (eds) *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell
Academic research on recruitment as opposed to selection processes is relatively undeveloped and there remain many central issues that have not been rigorously studied. In the USA the gap has been filled to some extent in recent years. The best summary and critique of this work is provided by Barber (1998). Taylor and Collins (2000) provide a shorter treatment with an additional practical focus.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CIPD commissions a large survey each year on recruitment and selection issues which tracks all the major trends and provides authoritative evidence about employer practices. The institute's journal, *People Management*, also publishes a very useful supplement each July reviewing developments in the recruitment industry.

Incomes Data Services, IDS Study No. 751 (June 2003)

Industrial Relations Service (2003d) 'The effective recruitment of managers', *IRS Employment Review*, No. 759, September

Industrial Relations Service (2003e) 'The effective recruitment of computer staff', *IRS Employment Review*, No. 760, October

Industrial Relations Service (2003f) 'The effective recruitment of sales staff', *IRS Employment Review*, No. 761, October
The IDS and IRS publications regularly feature articles and surveys about recruitment practices in UK organisations. The case studies they write are especially useful.

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Whiddett, S. and Kandola, B. (2000) 'Fit for the job?' *People Management*, 25 May, pp. 30–4.

Wood, R. and Payne, T. (1998) *Competency Based Recruitment and Selection: A Practical Guide*. Chichester: Wiley.

Wright, M. and Storey, J. (1994) 'Recruitment', in I. Beardwell and L. Holden (eds) *Human Resource Management*. London: Pitman.

An extensive range of additional materials, including multiple choice questions, answers to questions and links to useful websites can be found on the Human Resource Management Companion Website at **www.pearsoned.co.uk/torrington**.