

Lesson 3 Recruitment

Recruitment

Our topic in this lesson is recruitment, the all important way we get people into public employment. And we're going to use as our theme the idea from passive posting to head hunting. As we go through our lesson we'll see that it is becoming increasingly important for public administration to move away from what used to be the approach that they will post a job and people will come to a more aggressive head hunting approach. And we'll use these terms throughout as we go through this lesson.

Paradoxes of Recruitment

The Berman Text used the idea of paradox throughout as a way of capturing what's going on in the world of public administration/ human resource management. And a couple of paradoxes that they point out I think are particularly critical to understand the nature of the recruitment dilemma faced by public administration. First of all the public sector is seeking professional hires increasingly but lacks a coherent strategy to solve major recruitment issues the adequate number of qualified applicants from which good selection can be made.

It's been apparent in the last two decades at least in the number of studies that have been done and commissions set up to get at the whole question of why is it that the qualified applicants, particularly the best qualified graduates from major universities are no longer looking to public employment at employment of choice.

A second paradox is the idea that for the job seeker there seems to be a lot of public jobs open, a lot of employment opportunities but a scarcity of desirable positions. Part of the reason is explained by the fact that those already in the civil service system have an inherent advantage both in terms of the knowledge they bring and the access they have to job openings. And it seems as though people on the outside may have problems finding something that is really attractive. Likewise although we see more lateral movement and entry at middle positions as well as entry positions it's still maybe less than the case in the private sector.

Continuing with the idea of paradoxes there's also the paradox of balancing competing values. As we go through the study of public administration those of you who have been in Public Administration 500 know that we use this concept in general in public administration there are always competing values in the public sector. Values roughly associated with efficiency and effectiveness, getting things done on one side and doing it in a way that provides fairness, equity, accountability on the other. This is certainly true of the recruitment process for public sector employment. There's a need for timely recruitment. Generally it's the biggest single concern of applicants in hiring supervisors and the need to get people in to do the work but we also have to maintain a lengthy process in the name of fairness and openness. This is much more of a concern in the public sector employment than in private sector employment.

There's also the general question of what should be emphasized in the recruitment process. certainly the knowledge and skills that go along with the job, future potential, diversity or are there particular public sector values that need to be accentuated when it comes to public sector employment. Loyalty, perhaps patronage, fairness, patriotism, ethics, what should really be emphasized in the recruitment process and how do potential hirers figure out exactly who they want to hire. This is a significant question for all

managers in a position to hire individuals but I think particularly so in the case of people in the public sector. And if you add in there also the fact that civil service employees once they pass a probation period will have life tenure you're making a huge investment in the future whenever you hire anybody.

Another important notion regarding recruitment is the whole question of sham recruitment. I've been through this kind of recruitment myself and I suspect many of you have also where there is an insider candidate or whether there is a bogus kind of pool put together in order to achieve a certain predetermined result.

Is it appropriate to use open recruitment to fulfill a legal requirement when an internal candidate has already been selected implicitly? And is it fair to ask for job references in the initial job application process when only those of the most highly ranked candidates you know will be read?

Recruitment Context

So let's assume for the moment that your recruitment effort is an actually one, it's not a sham one, it's not wired for an internal employee to move up or whatever. What are the elements for the effective recruiting? First of all the breadth and quality of the process is important. If you really thought it out how you were going to do this from start to finish, who's going to get involved, just what is going to be the nature of the process.

The second is an assessment of the size of the labor pool and the location of jobs. Are you being realistic in assuming that given the labor pool and the job location that you're talking about here that you're going to be able to find a fit for what you're looking for and what's out there and available.

A third is the all important question of pay and benefits. And again this is an element of research that is necessary. Are you offering competitive pay or maybe a little bit more than competitive so that you can attract the best applicants? What's the relationship between pay and benefits and the actual package that you're going to present to a potential employee? Again often times in the public sector the pay not be as good as the private sector but benefits may outweigh it. And one of those benefits often times is the greater security offered by public sector employment.

Fourth, what's the quality of the job? What's the job exactly going to be like? How can you point this out to the applicants? How can you give them a feel what's it's actually going to be like to undertake employment in the organization in a particular job? What's the image of the organization? Is it considered to be an employer that is well respected, that treats its employees well, that has a good reputation? Or is the opposite? Is it a troubled organization? How are you going to present this image? Are you going to bring in people to give testimonies who are already working in the organization? Who are going to be your recruiters? Are they going to be professional recruiters or are they going to be people that are going to be requisitioned from the organization to actually point out what it's like to work there and be an example of the kind of person the new recruit would actually work with.

For instance, I remember many years the effective recruiting of the Peace Corp would do at universities where they would bring in both new recruits and people that were veterans of the Peace Corp and talk a little bit about their experiences. Often times they were very colorful experiences. My wife was in the Peace Corp in Senegal and West Africa almost 40 years ago now and still recalls what it was like to have that kind of exciting opportunity to work overseas. So that's very, very important.

And the organization image will often times determine whether or not a good match can be made between the person that you want and the person that is actually hired.

And finally contacts and references. Who can help you out? Who can you go to and say I have a really good job opening and I need a really good person to fill it? Contacts can be in universities, they can be in related type organizations. If you're part of a network now of organizations related to each other by mutual interest or mutual shared knowledge of a policy area, something like that. Who can you ask to serve as references or actually contact potential students or people in the field and say here's a good organization to work for, here's a good opportunity, you should get in touch with them?

Recruitment Steps

Taking a look at what actually happens in the recruitment process there's three stages. First is the planning and the approval of the position. The second is the preparation of the position announcement and the third is selection and usage of specific strategies. So recruitment plus screening plus ranking plus selection equals staffing and placement. It's quite a simple process. And again in the public sector because of its requirements for formality and fairness it follows a fairly set procedure.

In the previous slide we said that the whole recruitment effort is simple. That is it's fairly regularized but that doesn't mean there isn't a lot of work involved and much of the work has to take place before the recruitment effort even starts and that's in planning. The whole area of work force planning is extremely critical to make sure when you go out and do recruit that you know what you're looking for, you know what you're likely to find, you know that you're thinking ahead and not just dealing with the immediate needs of the organization.

So this planning that's usually done in combination between the line manager and the HR office would involve evaluating future needs, challenges and the status of the incoming workforce. In other words a kind of strategic view of things including a labor market survey, a needs assessment and other forms of planning that you feel might be necessary to entice qualified applicants. For instance, maybe looking at not just the labor market that you have available but the number of students graduating in a certain discipline from universities, the number of graduate degrees awarded and so forth.

And then you have to take all this strategic planning and tailor it to an actual vacancy and say here is the job we're looking for; what does all this research tell us about this specific job? Where are we going to look for someone? How long do we think it's going to take to find that person? What kind of pay and other enticements are going to be necessary? So tailoring the strategic results to an actual vacancy is where the recruitment process really starts to begin in earnest.

Specifically, the Warning Signs to Consider During Strategic Thinking

Another important way of looking at the strategy for recruitment is to look inside your organization and look at the more recent experiences you've had with recruitment. Specifically what are the some of the warning signs to consider? Have recent applicants seemed poorly qualified? Have they not seemed to be a good fit for what you're looking for? That may give you some hints as to either the way that you're doing your research or the way you're structuring the recruitment effort or simply the fact that you're looking for something and may not really be out there or not within your ability to hire.

Are supervisors complaining that the selectees that you've been hiring don't fit well in the department? Is there some kind of a problem in understanding the kind of individual who's likely to be successful in your organizational environment? Are the best candidates not applying? Do you have some way of understanding where the best candidates may be going in the field that you're looking for? Why you're

not getting them? Why they're not applying? And so forth? And have applicants found other positions while waiting for another offer? Have you been slow in moving from the recruitment process to the selection process? Or have applicants not really been serious when they've applied for your job and really wanted to go elsewhere.

There's a whole variety of warning signs to look at that you can factor into your workforce planning effort and make for better recruitment.

Position Announcements

Okay, so now we've done the basic analysis behind the recruitment plan. The next step is to actually come up with a position announcement. This document has to do a number of jobs at once and has to be done well. The basic content is there to sell the job, to make the job attractive, make the organization and the setting for the job appear attractive. Also to describe the basic requirements to make sure that there are very clear understandings on the part of the applicant of what is going to be required of the job. And finally instructions on how to apply and get more information. All of this is important. A poorly designed position announcement is likely to either confuse applicants or not get the sorts of people that really know what they're looking for.

There's also some requirement in here for some legal phrases to cover requirements for equal opportunity and that's simply to cover them but to make sure that you have shown the applicant your strategy includes attention to values like Equal Opportunity diversity whether it's the handicapped, racial minorities ethnic minorities and so forth. These are very, very important.

And the recruitment strategy has to be thought of when you're putting together a position announcement including the methods of contacting and informing potential applicants. Are you going to be passive and assume that a posted announcement is going to do the job? Where are you actually going to put it? Are you going to for instance target some diversity oriented publications that may attract applicants of diverse backgrounds? Are you going to put it in professional journals? What is your budget for doing it? How are you going to allocate the money? All these things are an important part of the role that the position announcement plays in your overall strategy.

Once we have the position announcement ready what do we do with it? What's our recruitment strategy? Where does it go? How often is it posted? And so forth. These are really critical questions to make sure you get the most bang for the buck with your position announcement.

Let's take a look at some of the alternative announcements. The first of these is electronic posting, some kind of an email list or list serv or something of that sort. Easy to use, reaches a large pool at minimal cost, in fact cost is probably the key word here that people find attractive. Studies indicate it's over used although one suspects that as time goes by more and more applicants are used to accessing or thinking really about electronic sources as the number one tool.

An older approach was newspapers particularly focus on local and regional newspapers where people tend to look at the classified ads, expect to find some kind of job listing. These are often times seen as the most effective vehicle for job announcements. They tend to be expensive especially if you use them more than once which is what most people find is necessary but can be very effective.

Trade journals. As we professionalize our workforce we find that more and more people are looking to trade journals for job announcements. In fact sometimes that's the main reason they access these trade journals or other kinds of newsletters and things like that from professional associations. Obviously this

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is important if you're targeting a professional audience. That's not going to get a more general audience. Often times not even students coming right out of graduate school. It's used extensively for professional and senior positions. It also can be costly because these tend to be low circulation journals. Often times this is how they make their money. Again sometimes you have to decide if one posting is enough or do you have to do it two or three months or quarters in a row.

Finally, email. This is a personalized approach used more by the private sector. The public sector is tied up often times by constraints about process, fairness and equity. Email can be inexpensive and quick. It also provides usually an easy way to record your communications.

Continuing our discussion about how to actually get the position announcement and the notice of the job out there to the right audience let's continue with the discussion of strategy. Mass communications can include such things as dedicated phone lines, government access television, institutional advertising. Often times used by cities and counties that have controlled access stations it increases awareness of the job and also of the medium that is used. On the other hand these often times are not the media people go to unless they really know about them. There are some limits here from what you can expect from these types of approaches.

Second approach is personal contact recruitment. A common approach here is job fairs, campus recruiting, contacting individual top candidates in somewhere or another. Common in business. Less common in the government sector although I think it's becoming a little bit more evident as government realizes it has to step up and be less passive. Often times particular agencies are good at this. I know I'm working now with some professionals in the intelligence area and they're going around and identifying approaches to jobs in the intelligence community.

It is an expensive way to do this. Expensive in two ways, one you have to actually travel to events and cover those costs and two you have to deal with the expense of taking people away from their normal work either getting substitutes to do work while they're doing recruiting or understand that you're going to lose some of the benefits of the individuals who can't do their normal work while they're out on the road.

And internships is another approach. A common practice in many jurisdictions, a lead organizations and the federal government. The benefits are better than almost any other method. It's very beneficial to both the employee and the employer. It is costly in the sense that you have to provide access to workspace, supervise these people but it gives you a very good sense of how they're going to fit into your workforce and your organization.

Let's finish our discussion of position announcements and advertising of jobs by looking at two other elements of recruitment strategy. The first of these is headhunting, a term that we use to describe the new process being utilized more commonly by government and other organizations. Often times this means outsourcing the recruitment approach to an agency or organization that specializes in a particular type of skill set or employment. For instance perhaps looking for people that can be city managers or county managers. In this case the work of the recruitment is actually contracted out to a different type of organization who can help you find the right person. It's also used sometimes particularly for temps or things as a way to bring in individuals at the lower end of the scale.

And finally non-competitive recruitment approaches. Here a single official completes the process without a formal comparison of candidates. Immediate hiring is allowed if the candidate meets the standard. The decision maker has the authority to make that selection. It's effective for hard to fill positions and positions where loyalty may be important. And of course it's popular with managers who find it gives them a great deal of discretion. It's been challenged because of affirmative action concerns and other

questions of fairness and often times it's used for higher level professional positions, general counsel position might be an example, some sort of medical or health official where the basically the test that is provided is a resume. An example of an experience in educational attainments that you have.

Diversity in Recruitment

Looking at diversity in a little bit more detail in the recruitment process let's remember it's both an ethical necessity and a management necessity. That it is required by rules and regulations but it's also the right thing to do and the smart thing to do given the fact that workforce is becoming more and more diversified and talent is everywhere out there and not simply in white males or people with Ivy League educations or whatever tended to be the standard in the past.

Three factors to consider when you're thinking about diversity in recruitment are these. If the agency's organizational culture are compatible with diversity if not you better make sure that it gets that way. But you have to be very, very careful to understand that when you're bringing in a more diverse workforce that you have the components in place for people to be effective, to be retained, to be happy and productive. Is there a deliberate attempt to maintain an acceptable balance according to affirmative action guidelines and what does this mean in terms of internalizing the values that go along with a desire to have a diverse workforce? And finally do your recruitment efforts reach a diversified group of applicants. For instance, are you doing a market analysis to see where candidates from a diverse background are going, what kind of journals, trade journals, specialized journals might important to reach them? Are you recruitment efforts reaching a diversified pool based simply on empirical standards? Looking back at previous recruitment efforts what does your pool look like? And if it isn't diverse give thought as to why it isn't.



Prospects: The Entry-Level Applicant's Perspective

Up to this point we've been looking at the recruitment process mostly from the managerial or organizational standpoint. What about the standpoint of the prospect? Many of you are probably in a position where you are perhaps considering the need to get into the recruitment process and look for a job or if you are on the other side still it's very important to understand the mentality of somebody looking at a job application and whether or not a particular job is good for them.

Some of the basics are well known but really not commonly practiced. There's a certain science or technique to being a smart recruit. First of all know the recruitment process and available resources. Get a sense of what people are doing in the recruitment process. Carefully screen the jobs before applying. I always tell people there's a tendency for everyone to be a bit irrational when it comes to interviews and decisions on jobs and sometimes if you're not sure that a job is going to be good for you don't apply because you might be kind of wooed into taking the job later on and regretting it later.

Certainly as a recruit you need to produce a customized, flawless cover letter. I know certain examples, I hate to point them out but as a member of a faculty recruiting committee I can think of one or two situations in the past where someone's forgotten to word process away a different organization somewhere and it shows up as in indication of where else the applicant has applied or they misspelled a name or there's something there and these things almost always produce laughs around the water cooler as they say. Ensure that all important information is available. Make it easy for people to get back in touch with you and include phone numbers, email addresses and so forth on the cover letter itself. If there are requirements for references make sure you check ahead of time with those people so they are not surprised if someone calls and asks for a referral.

Produce a well crafted resume. Make sure that it is attractive. Often times this can be done by spending a little money going to a professional service of some kind, put it on good quality paper, make it something that looks as though it's done by a person that attacks all their assignments with care and with a concern for detail. And don't invest time in researching the organization too much unless called for an interview in the public sector. On the other hand I'm not quite sure that – don't take this as an absolute gospel. It's important to research enough so that you know about the organization but don't assume that you're going to get an interview simply because you've applied for a job and spent a lot of time on a search that may not have much of a pay off.

The Mid-Career Professional

Just as many of you may be looking for entry level jobs or hiring entry level people so the same may be true of people looking for mid-career jobs or hiring mid-career professionals. Here certainly the investment on the part of both the individual and the organization is higher, the risks are greater and because skills and experience already exist the quality of a candidate's application weighs more heavily, very heavily on the recruitment process.

The mid-career professional really has to approach the recruitment process without making any mistakes or doing anything that raises serious questions about their value and viability for the organization. What should you do? Envision the ideal position, know what you want, you only have a few changes probably from one job to another in a career. Some people say five, some people say more but every time you do that you are raising some questions as to why you moved. What people like to see particularly is that you are moving to something that appears to them and you to be the ideal position, that it is you're working your way up. Here in academia it could be working your way up from one rank to another quickly or more likely going from a lesser institution to a more highly rated institution or program.

Candidly assess your strengths and weaknesses. Know exactly what is likely to happen in the interview process and in the job if you were to get it. Know that it's not so useful to overstate your case even if people buy and then find that you're in a job where you can't really perform. The mid-career person is not going to be given too much latitude. They're going to have to perform right away and perform at a very high or professional level of competence.

So enhance your promotion opportunities through rigorous self assessment of your personal strengths. Anticipate difficult interview questions. I think both of these bullet points basically say spend some time in front a mirror or in front of a significant other or colleague or can candidly assess whether or not you are really coming across in a way that you want to. And be realistic about the job potential. Remember again if you're doing a mid-career change you have to be sure that you're not going to be getting yourself into a dead-end right away or get into the wrong organization. So be realistic about what this job really entails.

Where Are We Now?

So where are we now? Let's take a look particularly at what's happening in the federal government because that's always an indicator of major changes in the system as a whole. Certainly the whole idea of human capital and the need to be more aggressive in dealing with the human capital needs of government is something that's been true of the new millennium, the last decade. We've had the Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 which has basically elevated human capital officers as a distinct class or group performing a very valuable service for the federal government.

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We also have on the other hand a different model. The DHS approach, the Department of Homeland Security where we see an effort toward at will or semi-at will employment to get away from the idea of the traditional civil service model and make the manager a little bit more flexible in terms of what they can do and the hiring practice.

And finally we have John Barry now, the Human Resource Czar so called. He's the Director of the Office of Personnel Management. He reports directly to the President. And he is a very entertaining and engaging person with a very strong belief that we need to move away from the passive approach of the past, make it easier for people to access jobs in the federal sector and to take a much more proactive approach to federal government hiring. On the other hand there's a lot of institutional inertia even within his own organization and in Congress and in the executive branch that makes it difficult to make quick changes in our approach to recruitment.

