The Challenges of Recruitment and Selection of Employees in Zimbabwean Companies

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Abstract: *Recruitment and selection of staff in Zimbabwe comes with challenges that the human resources manager must grapple with. This paper presents findings from a research carried out in 10 companies in Zimbabwe on the challenges that they face with recruitment and selection of staff. Identified challenges include brain drain, high labour turnover, scarcity of skills and expertise in the labour market, and unemployment. Other challenges include costs associated with recruitment. Smaller companies compete with bigger companies which can better absorb the costs associated with recruitment and are also capable of paying better salaries. Lack of human resources planning, geographical location of jobs and use of information technology in advertising are other challenges that employer organizations face when recruiting and selecting employees. These challenges have led to a lack of transparency in the recruitment process, untrustworthiness of employees, and favouritism involved with both external recruitment and internal promotions. Better management of the recruitment and selection process assists the organization in making realistic decisions about a prospective candidate. Better management implies proper human resource planning and writing accurate job descriptions to ensure that precedence is given to the competencies necessary for the achievement of the company's objectives.*

Keywords: recruitment, selection, challenges, human resources management, brain drain

1. Introduction

The word recruitment has been defined by different authors in different ways but all meaning the same thing. All the definitions seem to agree that recruitment is a process of actively seeking potential candidates in sufficient numbers and qualities to fill vacant positions within organization [6], [7]. It is a process of attracting job applications from those interested. It is that activity which generates a pool of applicants who have the desire to be employed by an organization from which those found suitable can be selected.

As Morrell [5] argues, recruitment should be regarded as the first step in filling in a vacancy. Ideally, recruitment should be taken as a proactive process of ensuring that the organization has the requisite skills and experience which cannot be easily built from within but sourced from outside the organization. Selection is understood to refer to the process of choosing or selecting the right candidate from a pool of potential candidates who have applied for a job. In short, recruitment refers to attracting job applications from interested people. Selection refers to the process of identifying the most suitable candidate from a pool of applicants. The Zimbabwean crisis in the new millennium has brought with it economic challenges resulting in high levels of unemployment and poverty. The recruitment and selection practice in Zimbabwean companies is fraught with challenges that should be properly managed to ensure the achievement of company objectives.

2. Background to the Study

In response to the economic challenges that Zimbabwe was facing in the late 80s and early 90s, the World Bank did not extend an export revolving fund until the country had liberalised its trade policy [9]. This resulted in Zimbabwe adopting a World Bank Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991. Measures taken by government in implementing ESAP include the following:

- A rapid devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar and introduction of a floating exchange rate;
- Eliminating controls on prices and wages;
- Liberalization of trade and investment;
- Reducing the civil service and state spending
- Ending subsidies
- Commercialisation of many government-owned businesses [3].

In spite of these efforts, the economic situation worsened. Poverty levels increased from 26% in 1990 to 55% in 1995 [3]. Successive years of drought impacted negatively on the land reform programme and made the people poorer. One of the most pressing health problems for Zimbabwe is the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has had negative impact and worsened the economic situation. It was estimated that one in every four adults was infected by the HIV virus in 2003 while it was estimated that by the end of 2007, 1.2 million people were living with HIV and AIDS. It is estimated that 140 000 people died from HIV/AIDS during 2007 [3]. In recent years, the HIV/AIDS prevalence in Zimbabwe has been declining from 18% in 2005 - 6 to 15 % in 2012 [8]. The HIV/AIDS pandemic resulted in deaths of working age people and early retirement from work due to illness.

Poor economic performance, successive years of drought all contributed to hyperinflation and the resultant corruption. By the end of 2008 the USD was equivalent to ZD with 21 zeros. In mid 2007 the parallel exchange rate was 1 000 times the official rate. This situation is often referred to as the Zimbabwe crisis. The Zimbabwe crisis saw many people migrating to live and work in neighbouring countries especially in Botswana and South Africa. In the formal sector the average monthly wage ranged from USD 150 to USD 300 [3]. The high levels of poverty and unemployment saw a lot of professionals migrating to Europe, America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, among other countries, in search of greener pastures.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the challenges of recruitment and selection that employers in Zimbabwe face and what can be done to management those challenges. This paper presents findings of the study based on a qualitative research carried out in 10 organizations in Zimbabwe.

4. Research Methodology

Interviews were held with a random selection of human resources managers from 10 organizations whose head offices are located in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The 10 randomly selected organizations included two (2) commercial banks, three (3) manufacturing companies, two (2) government ministries and three (3) retail companies. The key questions asked were:

What were the challenges associated with recruitment and selection that employers faced?

1. What were the challenges associated with recruitment and selection that prospective employees faced?
2. How can these challenges be managed or mitigated?

The study was targeted at Human resources practitioners in both the private and public sectors in Harare.

5. Importance of the Study

The study is important in that it identifies the challenges that manager's face in trying to recruit and select the right candidate for a job. The study also high lights those challenges that prospective employees face when they are applying for jobs. Suggestions on how the challenges of recruitment and selection of staff in Zimbabwe can be abated are provided in the study. The purpose of this paper is to present the findings from the study which was carried out in the first half of 2013. The research was based on a random selection of ten human resources practitioners from ten organizations consisting of three retail companies, two manufacturing companies, three commercial banks and two hospitality companies. The respondents were all from the capital city where head offices of most companies are located. The sample is not representative of the private and public organizations in Zimbabwe. It is indicative of the challenges facing employers and employees in general.

6. Research Findings

6.1 Cost of advertising

Advertising is done in order to have a greater pool of applicants from which to select. It is company policy in many organizations to advertise for vacant posts. Advertising in print media such as newspapers and journals and on television is expensive. The study established that most companies in Zimbabwe use print media for advertising job vacancies. Other than the cost, there is a another challenge associated with advertising, that of determining which is the best print media or television programme with a wider readership or listenership in which to advertise. A miscalculation of the media to advertise in

may be costly in that the effort may fail to reach the targeted potential candidates. Sourcing in the right place is a recruitment challenge for the human resources manager. Recruitment efforts may be made ineffective when the advertising does not reach the intended targeted destination. Choice of media is very critical for effective recruitment. For example the newspaper B-Metro in Bulawayo based and its circulation is also limited. The same can be said of H-metro whose circulation is limited to Harare. These papers are not widely circulated in Zimbabwe. Advertising in newspapers with a limited readership limits the recruitment pool. Many small to medium sized companies cannot meet the costs of advertising in the print media or on television and radio. The labour pool for such organizations tends to be small and they end up employing less qualified personnel.

6.2 Misrepresentation of qualifications (fake qualifications)

Misrepresentation can occur during a selection process when an eloquent communicator can get the job only to be realised later that he is incapable or does not have the right qualifications or experience. Relevant qualifications for the job are often used during the selection process to screen and short list the candidates. The study has established that sometimes applicants present fake diplomas or certificates. There are instances where potential candidates have used other people's qualifications especially relatives with same surnames. Because of the high rate of unemployment some job applicants present fake qualifications. When a company discovers the fact or when the incumbent fails to perform, the company is then forced to re advertise the job and this is costly both in terms of time and money. It is advisable for organizations to employ the services of recruitment agencies that are able to pick fake qualifications and misrepresentation.

6.3 Nepotism and favouritism

Prospective employees face problems associated with nepotism and favouritism. In recruitment and selection nepotism is defined as the practice of unfairly giving the best jobs to members of your family when you are in a position of power [2]. In most case in Zimbabwe, nepotism happens when those in higher management positions influence the recruitment and selection process. Top management takes advantage of their positions to secure jobs to favour friends and relatives. The organization goes through the process of advertising for a vacant post as a matter of procedure. The process of selection and recruitment is done to fulfil a requirement when a candidate had already been identified. Some candidates might not even go through the recruitment and selection process as other candidates do. Such situations make a mockery of the recruitment and selection process.

It is common practice for owners of smaller organizations to influence the recruitment and selection process by favouring their relatives or friends. The issue of qualifications becomes unimportant as people can learn and get experience on the job. This practice has often resulted in qualified potential candidates not applying for jobs as they see it as a waste of time. Our study has established that it is common to find that

the majority of the company's employees belong to the same totem.

6.4 Geographical location of a company

Geographical location of a company may pause recruitment challenges in cases where the company is located very far away from city centres. The pool of employees can be limited. Potentially qualified and experienced people may not want to be relocated to places far away from their families unless they can take their families with them.

6.5 Change in business model

A change in an organization's business model may also pose challenges for recruitment. Upon establishment a company might have needed more unskilled labour. As the company develops its demands for unskilled labour may be reduced and the right pool of employees that suits the new business model might not be available in the area.

6.6 Political interference

Government controlled companies such as parastatals also face challenges of recruitment. Political polarisation has spilled over into companies. It became obvious during the research that sometimes politicians may influence the recruitment and selection process by referring candidates for appointment to vacant positions. The Human resources managers usually comply for fear of losing their jobs. Sometimes these results in the company appointing under qualified personnel at the expense of qualified and experienced people. Just like nepotism, political interference has led to organizations appointing people on the basis of their political affiliation, a challenge which prospective employees face. Because of the political polarisation in the country between the major political parties, human resources managers experience a dilemma as from which political background should employees be selected.

6.7 Brain drain and lack of qualified and experienced people in the local pool

An organization is forced to recruit from far afield because of a lack of qualified personnel in the locality. Sometimes organizations go beyond their national borders to recruit from the region and sometimes internationally. The costs associated with regional and international recruitment may lead companies to recruit sub standard personnel whose experience is limited or who they will have to train.

Economic instability and general melt down of the economy saw many qualified and experienced people leaving the country to look for greener pastures in neighbouring countries in the region and abroad. For example by 1993 Zimbabwe had lost a third of its doctors and many health workers and teachers also left the country to neighbouring countries [4]. This exodus of qualified people resulted in the labour force being filled with fresh graduates with no or little experience, a phenomenon which poses challenges of recruitment and selection for the human resources manager. For some professions, companies are forced to employ less qualified and experienced people or to employ expatriates who are very costly.

6.8 Over qualification syndrome

The high level of unemployment in the country has not only resulted in brain drain but also in the presence of over qualified people. The labour market may be flooded with highly qualified and experienced people chasing few jobs. Job shortages have resulted in applicants accepting any job that come their way. As a result, as soon as the candidate gets a better job they quit resulting in a high labour turnover. The company will then be obliged to go through another recruitment and selection process.

The process of recruitment and selection usually takes time. The recruitment policy may require the vacancy to be advertised in the media. A lot of applications may be received for just one vacancy. Sometimes a candidate who lives very far away in the rural areas, where communication is a problem, may be identified as the most suitable candidate. The candidate may not be reachable because of poor communications problem. This leaves the human resources manager with no option but to take the next best available candidate.

Big companies are now turning to the internet for recruitment purposes in what is known as E-recruitment. The use of the internet is increasingly being used for recruitment purposes. Job vacancies are placed on recruitment websites making it easier for potential candidates to apply. E– Recruitment provides greater coverage globally. On the other hand, use of the internet widens the recruitment pool that it might take time to select the appropriate candidate if the response is overwhelming. Those companies that are unable to do E-recruitment become uncompetitive as they are not able to have an extensive coverage of targeted market.

6.9 Outdated /inadequate job descriptions

Technological changes are moving at a very fast speed. Technological changes may affect how a job is done and the specifications required for that job may also change. This has implications on recruitment and selection as the job description of the vacant position might be outdated or inadequate. A review of the vacant position's job description must be done in order to ensure relevance of the job requirements and specifications.

There might be situations where a company is venturing into a new industry and new jobs are created. This means that there may be no frame of reference for creating new job descriptions in such circumstances. The company might not have knowledge of the background and experience required for new jobs. The selection process becomes a trial and error one.

6.10 Challenges of internal versus external recruitment and selection

It is common practice for companies to search for recruitment of new employees internally first before recruiting from external sources. Internal recruitment is less costly in that no external advertising is done. The internally recruited staffs needs less induction and orientation training than externally recruited ones. They adjust easily to the

environment. Little production time is lost through orientation and induction training. Staffs are motivated to perform when they know that for any promotion or new vacancies, they are given a chance to apply for the jobs. However, internal recruitment limits the company to a small pool of candidates. External recruitment has some disadvantages. Over and above advertising costs, external recruitment is costly in that the new recruit will need to be inducted to the company and the job. It may take some time before the new candidate can start performing. There are recruitment, including and possible relocation, costs associated with external recruitment.

6.11 Size of recruiting firm

The size and type of organization has implications on the challenges of recruitment and selection. Qualified and experienced job seekers tend to choose larger firms than smaller ones. The ability to pay better salaries that bigger companies possess over smaller companies makes it difficult for smaller companies to attract highly qualified people.

7. Importance of Managing the Recruitment and Selection Process

The recruitment and selection process helps the organization in a number of ways. The whole purpose of recruitment and selection process is for the organization to find people who will be a perfect match to the jobs for which they will be employed and thereby ensuring that, as much as possible, the organization will be staffed with the right people with the right skills, knowledge, experiences and competences at the right time. The recruitment and selection process helps the organization in making realistic decisions about a prospective candidate. It also provides the organization with the knowledge of sources of potential recruits. As part of the human resources planning system, the recruitment and selection process helps the organization in determining its future human resources requirements and its ability to meet its objectives in view of the work systems and technology in use.

It is important for an organization to write accurate job descriptions before a vacancy is advertised. This ensures that precedence is given to the competencies that would make the most positive contribution to the achievement of the company's objectives. If done properly the recruitment and selection process can attract good candidates and can provide the organization with useful indicators for future performance.

A good recruitment and selection process ensures conformity to legal requirements as dictated by the Labour Relations Act. The process should be transparent and should ensure privacy and observance of equal opportunity legislation. The process therefore ensures that the selection process is fair and meets legal requirements. A good recruitment and selection policy ensures consistency in hiring staff and reduces the risk of bias or discrimination. Consequently, a good recruitment and selection process ensures that administrative procedures are handled efficiently.

The process helps in injecting new blood to the organization. There is also need to ensure that the recruitment and selection process is transparent at every stage. Key stakeholders in the process (line managers, human resources department etc) should be able to follow the process and develop confidence in the outcome. Some organizations initiate the recruitment process just to build up a "talent pool" or simply to gauge what the market holds. It can be used as a strategy for building the organization's capability in a changing market environment. The recruitment and selection process also provides the organization with the knowledge of sources of potential recruits.

8. Future Scope of the Study

This study has highlighted the challenges of recruitment and selection of employees in Zimbabwean companies under the current economic hardships. It will be necessary to carry out another study to assess the impact of economic improvement on recruitment and selection of employees.

9. Conclusion

The findings of research into the challenges faced by 10 organizations in Zimbabwe as regards recruitment and selection are indicative of the challenges faced by employer organization in Zimbabwe in general. The study revealed that cost of advertising, misrepresentation of qualifications, nepotism and favouritism, geographical location of a company, change in business model of the organization and political interference pose challenges of recruitment and selection.

The Zimbabwean economic crisis has led to a brain drain and lack of qualified and experienced people in the local labour market. This has posed challenges for smaller firms which end up competing with bigger firms which can afford to pay better salaries. On the other hand the country is also experiencing the over qualification syndrome. The later has seen the labour market being flooded with people who are overqualified for the few available jobs. Using outdated and inadequate job descriptions result in the recruitment of people with inappropriate qualifications and experience.

While use of information technology and E – recruitment facilitates casting the net for recruitment globally, it poses challenges in the management of the data and information that is generated in responses, thereby rendering the selection process problematic. Finding the right candidate for a job is dependent upon a number of factors, both internal and external to the organization

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Author Profile

Alice Zinyemba received a B.A. general degree from the University of Zimbabwe in 1978. She then pursued post-graduate studies in Community Development at the University of Alberta, Canada in 1982. She qualified with an MBA and holds a D. Phil degree in Commerce from the University of Zimbabwe in 1988 and 2013 respectively. Between 1988 and 2008, she worked as an Organizational Development (OD) consultant and Human Resources manager for several public and private sector organizations in Zimbabwe. Alice Zinyemba is currently a practising OD consultant and lecturers in Business Administration and Marketing at the University of Zimbabwe.