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Strategic Human Resource Management Function and HR Staffing: A Case Study of Telecom Sector

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ABSTRACT

The portfolio attempts to analyze various aspects of recruitment and selection so as to explore various issues around it, guidance available under relevant management theories and practices including a case study of a multinational telecom company. An effective strategic human resource management function within firms may offer an inclusive reply and exposure to the concerns as (a) which approaches profitable conglomerates to employ in recruiting and selecting workforce, (b) which hiring policies and programs are typically effectual, (c) how the hiring procedures influence corporation bottom line and contribute towards the organizational strategic goals. This is a qualitative study which is based on the understanding gained during the job, published material, research reports and articles including those which has been included in this portfolio, the knowledge relating to recruitment and selection is being best summarized. In order to study a case from the real world, a multinational mobile company, which is the pioneer telecom technology company in Pakistan, has been selected to understand their recruitment and selection policy and procedural guidelines. This portfolio is contributing towards the enhancement of understanding of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in general and recruitment and selection process in particular along with the underpinning issues and challenges.

*Key Words:* Recruitment, Selection, Human Resource, Human Capital, Management, Merit, Reference Checks, Interviews, Assessment, Prospective

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations succeed largely through the efforts of their employees. It suggests that selecting the right employee is a cornerstone of a better administration (Taylor & Collins, 2000). The outcomes of right hiring are often clear, whereas, those of regrettable hiring are not every time conspicuous and irrefutable. The price of publicity, organization time occupied in hiring and then coaching and mentoring, and the cost of firing and exit are simple to ascertain.

However, the continuing upshot like declining emotional state of workers condensed business prospects, a diminished attribute of goods or service are probably much severe.

Recruitment is referred as creating a pool of the candidates; it is concerned with not only approaching the public but also making right candidates believe in contending for last selection (Barber, 1998), however, selection means choosing suitable applicants for the job; a procedure of excluding unsuitable candidates (Guion, 1976). The current study investigates hiring as a key determinant for effective human capital (HC) administration. Since inside the human resource management (HRM) archetype, these are not merely apparatuses to fill vacant positions but may be analyzed like strategic 'push' and 'pull' levers for organizational change. Recruiting and selecting the right people is of paramount importance to the continued success of an organization as it allows management to determine and gradually modify the behavioral characteristics and competencies of the workforce (Henry & Temtime, 2010). Over the years, the terms used to describe staff and employees in organizations have changed from Personnel to Human Resource (HR) and now to Human Capital. Therefore, it is very important to understand the concept of human capital, which can be gained with the help of the following definition by a renowned expert in HR. According to Stockley (2008):

"The term human capital is recognition that people in organizations and businesses are an important and essential asset who contributes to development and growth, in a similar way as physical assets such as machines and money. The collective attitudes, skills, and abilities of people contribute to organizational performance and productivity. Any expenditure in training, development, health, and support is an investment, not just an expense."

To provide an overview of the hiring procedure in the overall strategic HRM context, following diagram by Nankervis, Compton, and Baird (2002) could be very useful:



Figure 1: SHRM and Strategic Recruitment and Selection

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## **Major Issues**

Major issues confronted by the organizations in connection with HR staffing exercise are outlined hereunder:

- 1. Inappropriate assessment of strategic requirements (Bechet & Walker, 1993)
- 2. In Position analysis, job description and SKA's are not aligned with strategic requirements (Schneider et al., 2002).
- 3. HR Policy framework not adequately addresses the social factors, external and internal environment, gender discrimination and other statuary obligations (Beattie & Johnson, 2012; Dawn Metcalfe & Afanassieva, 2005)
- 4. Risk of wrong decision making with respect to various aspects of recruitment and selection such as mode of recruitment, shortlisting, method of selection, reference checks, interview and selection decision candidate may be qualified/over-qualified/qualifiable, appointment of successful candidate and dealing with unsuccessful applicants and deployment (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Cole, Feild, Giles, & Harris, 2009).

## **Pertinent HR Theories and Practices**

There has been a lot of research carried out on HRM including staffing. Some of the pertinent theories in this relation are briefly described as the theory of classical management, scientific management asserts that work can be technically examined; workforce can be methodically chosen; training guarantees work and worker fit; and administration worker link should be affable, supportive and fruitful. This theory was employed by Taylor and he basically incorporated the earlier ideas of Robert Owen (1771-1858) and his work has been further developed by Henry L. Gantt and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth including the ideas of performance-based cash and in-kind incentives and designing job again (Taylor, 1914). The classical organization theory is exemplified through the work of Favol and Max Weber (1864-1920). Fayol identified management functions as those of planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Fayol, 1949). Nevertheless, next theorists summarized these to planning, organizing, leading and controlling activities. Weber classified organizations by authority structures as charismatic, traditional or rational-legal (Weber, 1946). There were few researchers who represented transitional human relations theory, which situates amid traditional management and behavioral strategies to the employability with their key focus on societal elements at workplace covering job groups, headship modes and unofficial arrangements in companies (Bernard, 1948; Follet, 1918; Urwick, 1944). While the behavioral school, industrial psychology endeavors to relate study to the employer-employee link. emotional Munsterberg employed personality study to choose worker, restructuring the job and training schemes (Münsterberg, 1915). Further, Dill and McKeen made personality assessments techniques for the hiring of marketing people especially the salesmen and management cadre employees (Cattell, 1981; Dill, 1961). In addition to the above management science, the quantitative school approaches emphasis on gauging the results of the job with the employment system. Applications comprise manufacturing timetable, production plans and resulting supervision with effective plan and command mechanism. Moreover, the contingency theory was formulated by a writer like Tom Burns, Henry Mintzberg, Hershey, and Blanchard. The said theory declared that each company and each set is diverse and thus entails a diverse style (Burns, 1961; Hershey & Blanchard, 1995; Mintzberg, 1979). Above theories may well or may not well put into operation, as per the organization situations. The said theory has been successfully applied to leadership and management behavior.

## **Key Challenges**

Following are some of the key challenges, which may be faced by most of the organizations while recruiting and selecting the workforce (Heneman, Judge, & Heneman, 2000; Hsu & Leat, 2000; Teclemichael Tessema & Soeters, 2006):

- 1. Formulation of HR Recruitment and Selection Policy
- 2. Recognition of HRM as a key contributor to organizational success
- 3. Setup of the dedicated and empowered HR function
- 4. Uniform application of recruitment and selection policy and procedural guidelines
- 5. Addressing the Stereo Type behavior and believes
- 6. Gender decimation, minority deprivation, and biases
- 7. Upholding Merit and transparency
- 8. Map and standardize staffing and supplementary HR functions, at the right time and with right people in order to accomplish the short, medium- and long-term corporations' goals.
- 9. Locating suitably qualified applicants from inside and outside the organization to fit in with job openings.
- 10. Adopting appropriate and well-structured recruitment and selection techniques.
- 11. Deciding upon the suitability of the candidate with reference to job requirement, job description, and personal specification.
- 12. Compliance with organizational and regulatory obligations.

#### The Rationale for the Study

It is envisaged that the ineffective application and implementation of policies and practices relevant to recruitment and selection is not appreciable in every sector of Pakistan. HR staffing is largely responsible for making the congenial working environment and gaining competitive advantage. The rationale for this study should, therefore, be viewed in the context of the ground realities associated with corporations who are confronting challenges due to the nonexistence or in-adequate formulation and implementation of HR staffing procedures while sustaining a bond with diverse stakeholders (including coworkers, clients, bosses and dealers etc.) in all sectors.

## **Problem Statement**

Effective HR staffing is not a child's play. Actual practice has not been attained. Is HR staffing handling is pragmatic, rational, specifically in the telecom sector of Pakistan? Establishing a clear concept regarding the HR staffing mechanism to the differentiation between the telecom and other sector organizations in Pakistan is also under research area (Mahmud, Billah, & Chowdhury, 2012). There are few studies conducted in the telecom sector of Pakistan but there focus is on the relationship of outsourcing recruitment procedure and employee loyalty and dedication (Ahmed, Vveinhardt, Ahmad, & Mujeeb, 2014; Benish Hussain Janjua, 2014; Jamil & Neem, 2013) or on E-recruitment (Malik & Razaullah, 2013). One key study was done to see the role of recruitment and selection on job performance but in the public sector of Pakistan (Rehman, 2009). So, as per authors' best of knowledge, there is a void in the literature because not a single research has been done to study the relationship of SHRM function and HR staffing especially in telecom sector of Pakistan.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

To study guidance available under relevant management theories and practices including a case study of a multinational telecom company for

- 1. Enhancement of understanding of SHRM in telecom sector of Pakistan
- 2. Enhancement of understanding of recruitment and selection process in the telecom sector of Pakistan
- 3. Underpinning issues and challenges associated with SHRM in telecom sector of Pakistan
- 4. Underpinning issues and challenges associated with the recruitment and selection process in the telecom sector of Pakistan

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Keeping in view the topic under discussion, a number of articles have been reviewed especially relating to recruitment and selection. It is found that human resource management strategies such as hiring should be aligned with SHRM (Martín Alcázar, Miguel Romero Fernández, & Sánchez Gardey, 2013). SHRM is a firm based and interrelated with HRM practices, focus on stakeholder's value and strengthens the relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance. There are basically four perspectives such as universalistic, contextual, contingency and configurational in HRM that define SHRM (Uysal, 2014). Nowadays, managers are required to work as strategic human resource managers (Gannon, Doherty, & Roper, 2012). Emphasis on SHRM through HR systems result in firm performance (Chadwick, Super, & Kwon, 2015). SHRM practices like hiring, training, and performance evaluation enhances the performance of the firm. (Arunprasad, 2017).

It was found that honesty and integrity in hiring are given more weight than candidates' ability and aptitude in the small businesses as compared to the large businesses (Bartram, Lindley, Marshall, & Foster, 1995). Majority of the organizations use the interviewing method for hiring rather than assessment centers and psychological test (Heraty & Morley, 1998). While taking hiring decisions, large businesses expect from university graduates to pass through training and development programs before practical work (Stewart & Knowles, 2000). Rynes, Colbert, and Brown (2002) have also discussed HR staffing practices and they argued that the practitioners have less faith in personality and intelligence tests as compared to HR literature. In another research, the use of different trends of selection like assessment centers, psychometric tests, and personality testing was identified (Kwiatkowski, 2003). Tanova (2003) contributed that selection of hiring method is not linked to turnover in small organizations. It was also found that Chinese multinational enterprises (MNEs) are using hiring policies and practices which are more prone towards modern HRM concepts over those of domestic Chinese firms (Shen & Edwards, 2004). In a survey, Piotrowski and Armstrong (2006) found that the majority of the organizations were using traditional hiring methods. Geerlings and Veen (2006), have argued that by simulating the mobility of the staff between positions within the organization, it is possible to analyze, in depth the effects of selection policy on a firm's employees. In his article, Moy (2006) has suggested that organizations may use both conscientiousness screening tests and work sample screening tests for assessing the right traits and eventually selecting the right candidates. In order to further understand the findings of the research conducted with respect to selection decision making, following diagram by Moy (2006) may be considered:



*Figure 2:* Ideal Employee and Successful Applicant Source: Adapted from (Moy, 2006).

Sue-Chan and Dasborough (2006), have researched the effect of hiring decisions based on rule or relation in diverse cultural settings of Australia and Hong Kong, China. The research defines the two types of decisions as follow:

The relation-based decision is a decision which is influenced by (a) kinship, that is elder brother-younger brother or (b) a frequent social relation i.e. friend, co-worker. In Chinese, this concept is also referred to as "Guanxi". On the other hand, Rule-based decision is a decision which is primarily made by book i.e. based on established norms, policies and procedures rather than relationships. This concept is generally observed in the west except for Australia, where friendship is highly regarded in their cultural values of "Mateship", which is similar to the Chinese concept of "Guanxi". Mateship can be defined as a multifaceted blend of collectivist and equalitarian values grasped at the individual level in companionship.

Branine (2008) argued that recruitment procedures for the selection of graduate candidates used in UK firms are based on a person related rather than job oriented factors. Talent management through better hiring strategies results in enhanced firm's performance (Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008). In the Egyptian national context, HR staffing process and associated responsibilities are shared with line managers (El-Kot & Leat, 2008). It is found that recruiting criterion is matched with the competitive environment of organizations (Lin, Zhang, Chen, Ao, & Song, 2009). Mapping of competencies has been recommended for better hiring

(Reddy & Reddy, 2012). It is also found that the age group of the interviewer's matters during the hiring interview (Allen, Schetzsle, L. Mallin, & Bolman Pullins, 2014). Job analysis statement and job descriptions of team positions found missing during the recruitment and selection (Saqib, Khan, Raza, Sohail, & Zainab, 2016). In Nigeria, the use of recruitment agencies and the referral from the existing employees resulted in more competent and productive employees (Oaya, Ogbu, & Remilekun, 2017).

EU agencies have a merit-based recruitment process (Egeberg, 2017). Ashraf (2017), examines that hiring procedure in public sector lacks not only in proper job analysis but also in providing a proper job description to their employees. The technical skills and competencies of management accountants are taken for granted now and employers tend to focus more on a person's appearance and credibility (Lepistö & Ihantola, 2018). Summary of the study has been provided in Appendix A.

#### METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study which is based on the understanding gained during the job, published material, research reports and articles including those which has been included in this portfolio, the knowledge relating to recruitment and selection is being best summarized. In order to study a case from the real world, a multinational mobile company, which is the pioneer telecom technology company in Pakistan, has been selected to understand their recruitment and selection policy and procedural guidelines. Based on the interviews of the HR Manager based at Lahore office in 2017 and subsequent information exchanged, the researcher's understanding as to their staffing process is elaborated. Both induction and deduction methods were used to understand and draw conclusions.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION Recruitment and Selection at Zong – A Case Study Overview of the Organization

In order to study a case from the real world, a multinational mobile company, which is one of the largest telecom technology company in Pakistan, has been selected to understand their recruitment and selection policy and procedural guidelines.

Zong is the fastest growing network in Pakistan with a growth rate of 500 percent in just three years. Zong continuously invests heavily in GSM networks, facilities of transmissions and their support systems and also in developing the new technology and new ideas to their operations.

Pakistan is one of the largest mobile network users with 134 million users of mobile phones (10% YOY Average Growth). As Pakistan telecom industry is divided between five big companies and the competition is always high as the competitors provide different offers and packages to attract customers. Khursheed (2017) presents the facts and figures of Pakistan mobile industry in Appendix C. The Appendix shows that Zong is the second best in terms of 3G/4G subscribers (10.76%) after Ufone and also the second best in terms of market share (27%) after Mobilink in Pakistan. Zong 4G emerged as the biggest and leading network in the

telecom industry. According to PTA, Zong has got a 99.3% success rate in customer's resolution of 2017.

#### **Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures**

Based on the interviews of the HR Manager, researcher's understanding as to their staffing process is as under:

# **Policy Statement**

The staffing policy is intended to guarantee that HR department moves from conventional organizational human resources function to more applicable and improved personnel administrative function. The aim of the process is to make sure that the HR Department and Line Management drive and take joint ownership of the process from beginning till the end and ensure equal opportunity to candidates from the market-leading towards quick and right identification of superior quality applicant in short time.

## Procedure

## **Approvals- Employee Requisition Form (ERF)**

The procedure is valid for unfilled current and fresh position. For fill up, an available or a fresh job position, the demanding supervisor/ operational level manager ensures that ERF has been submitted and approved by the company before the start of the process. The Routing procedure starts from the request by the concerned Section/ department head, which is endorsed by the division head/ GM, reviewed by director human resources and approved by the company head/ CEO/ COO. ERF should have the standard job description (circulated by HR) as its attachment.

**Profile and JD.** On completing the above requirements, HR prepares the profile of the applicant using the ERF. The profile will comprise relevant key skills, behaviors, and accountabilities as required for the vacant role.

**Sourcing.** If management ascertains that there is no appropriate candidate within the organization, HR will source through advertisements or source through the HR CV Database or through approved Consultants or web or existing employees referral scheme, whereby cash bonus, being equivalent to one basic salary of selected employee, is awarded to referring employee in case of success. The concerned function/ department will make sure the availability of funds for external advertisements.

**Short-listing.** Once the CVs are received in HR, they are stamped for the date of receipt on each. The HR department is responsible to ensure that every application received is acknowledged in writing. After the last date of the application, HR screens all applications according to the profile.

Assessment center test. All potential applications are called for an assessment center test, where, they are tested with reference to their standard assessment test. Those who qualify the assessment center test ensuring them competitive with minimum 50% marks are considered for an interview and marked as "I" (interview). However, those who were either not suitable for the job were unable to qualify the test are marked either "R" (reject) or "F" (future use). After screening the applications, marked "I", and narrowing them down to ten or fifteen; HR holds a session with the head of the concerned department to further narrow down the applications to five or six candidates.

**Interviews.** After the above procedure, interview panels will be formed as follows:

- For all junior management positions at grade G6/T4/S4 and below Immediate supervisor, Division Head and HR representative.
- For all middle and senior management positions grade G5/T4/S3 and above Immediate supervisor, senior HR representative and representative(s) from the HR Committee.

The interview process is based on consensus recruitment methodology, which is focused on equal assessment of two dimensions: skills and behaviors (See Annexure B). Each member of the interview panel will be involved in interviewing short-listed candidates. Post interview, members of the interview panel will be required to complete and submit to HR, the Interview Assessment Form containing key behavioral competencies which require to be assessed, measured and documented by each interviewer who should focus on past examples of behavior and probe further to conclude understanding of the required focused areas.

Decision. After the conclusion of the interview process, the interviewers should meet to consolidate and compare their assessments, as documented in the Interview Assessment Form. In case of differences of view between Panel members, the decision is required to be escalated to the HR Committee.

Reference checks. All position grades G5/T4/S3 and above requires the approval of the HR Committee for the issuance of the appointment letter. For these position grades and above, HR checks at least 2 unrelated references furnished by the candidate. The outcome of the Reference Checks is documented in the personal file of the employee. An offer letter of employment is only made after the satisfactory completion of this formality.

Compensation decision. Pay and benefits are controlled through HR only, in consultation with the HR Committee.

Evaluation of the Approach at the Company

Mobile company is a multinational group company, has put in place a very organized, well-structured and standardized hiring approach that is fairly aligned with the theoretical substance, the researcher has gone through so far. The role of the HR department is of paramount importance and every aspect of employee relation is routed through HR and line managers and senior management is in practice of acknowledging the said fact and any significant matter is considered and decided in the HR Committee, which comprises of CEO, CFO, Head of HR and Heads of the Department.

As a whole, this is a real-time example of a typical strategic recruitment and selection process which incorporates in it an assessment center methodology followed by a panel interview approach of selection. Further, it shows that organizations, particularly those working in the service sector are realizing the strategic importance of HRM and trying to maintain an ideal employee-employer relationship, recruiting applicants purely on the basis of job fit, ability to deliver and merit, providing employees congenial and healthy working conditions.

After reviewing the literature, it is found that Hong Kong, Chinese and Australian cultural context seem to count knowledge, skills, and abilities in employee selection decision making, wherein friendship based particularistic relationships are more likely to be counted in case of Australia as compared to Hong Kong, China (Geerlings & Veen, 2006).

In the work of Moy (2006), academic performance has been used for measuring the candidate's general intelligence, which may not be the case in actual. Sue-Chan and Dasborough's (2006) research examined that how specific association dependent on friendship effects recruitment and selection practices in a relation-based and rule-based cultural context but traditional Australian locations have been selected to populate the results for entire Australia, whereas this may not be the case in reality. Whereas Egeberg et al. (2017) in his article discusses the selection and recruitment criteria of European agencies that how they select their personnel and what procedures they adapt to select their candidates but the study lacks in a sense that it depends on qualitative data. According to Ashraf (2017), KPIs are not aligned with job description is the main reason for the low performance of the public sector in Pakistan. It also affects the promotion and pay-raises system in public organizations of Pakistan. In the researcher opinion, reviewed literature can be considered a valuable contribution towards the enormous work already carried out in the field of HRM in general and HR staffing in particular. Despite the fact that these researches have their own implications and limitations, but still can prove to be a step forward to achieve the end objective of HR staffing i.e. "to attract the right person at the right time for the right job." Specially the consideration of behavioral aspects, methodologies adopted by the recruiters to evaluate desirable and observable personality attributes of the prospective candidates and far-reaching impact of changes in selection policies over the workforce composition as well as attainment of organizational goals and objectives really guide you through the intricacies of HR staffing and set another dimension for the employers to explore so that they make wise and prudent decisions while recruiting and selecting.





**Figure 3**: HR and Organizational Strategic Objectives – Exploring a Link. Source: Adapted from Krishnan, S., & Singh, M. (2006).

There is a strong association between the objectives of Human Resource and Strategic objectives of the organization, which can be better comprehended with the help of the following diagrams:



**Figure 4**: HRM process linkage with the enhanced employee performance. Source: Adapted from (Teclemichael Tessema, & Soeters, 2006).

#### CONCLUSION

As the human capital takes center stage in today's economy, the HR function is becoming a strategic powerhouse in organizations. Based on the understanding gained during the class work, routine assignments, subject books, published material, research reports and articles including those which has been included in this portfolio, the knowledge relating to recruitment and selection can be best summarized with the help of the following

The article reviewed highlights the recruitment and selection areas in which HR managers and executives need to focus so as to strike a balance between the behavioral issues and skills matrix of the prospective employees.

In order to achieve the job fit person at the right time and place, HR managers and executives need to excel in a number of areas, including HR planning, recruiting, selecting and training, which should be duly wrapped up with the knowledge of strategic contribution, business knowledge, appropriate job requirement analysis and personal specifications, suitable modes of recruitment and selection including e-recruitment, which is aligned with organizational cultural context, Scanning of external dynamic environment, job market conditions, gender and minority discrimination, merit, legal framework applicable to hiring and firing, and HR technology and latest happenings. In short, HR is emerging as a driving force that changes the way organizations do business and requiring organizations to look for new ways of hiring and utilizing people so as to gain a competitive advantage over others.

# Recommendations

Researchers would like to offer their perspective on the issues pertaining to recruitment and selection practices based on the discussion so far in a problem-solving manner, as follows:

1. No doubt the best hiring strategies contribute towards enhanced institutional performance. The more effectively organizations hire staff, the more likely they are to recruit, select and retain satisfied employees. Organizational recruitment and selection policies must be developed through a well-thought and structured process and should clearly spell out the policy objectives. The objectives must supplement the HR strategies and objectives, which are developed within the overall ambit of business strategy, thus creating inter-linkages.

- 1. The organizational policies should be followed by detailed procedural guidelines regarding each and every step involved in the entire process. However, while developing such procedures, among others, following external and internal factors should be carefully considered:
- a. Nature of business
- b. Corporate status
- c. Size and complexity of organizational structure
- 2. Resource allocation
- a. Exiting employee turnover
- b. Per employee contribution towards profit
- c. Market and economic conditions and competitors analysis
- d. Future growth potential and availability of workforce
- e. Legislation
- 2. The barriers to effective recruitment including the stereotyping need to be carefully addressed while executing the policy and procedural guidelines so that the intended objectives of the formulated policy are achieved through its uniform implementation.
- 3. After each execution of the recruitment and selection process, a formal evaluation session can serve to be very useful to identify performance and planning gaps, if any, in the entire process.

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