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## **ACADEMIC STAFF SELECTION IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN – THE CASE OF COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper looks at the academic staff selection practices at the Colleges of Technology in Oman. An inductive reasoning or bottom up approach was used in this research project. The main method of data collection used was semi-structured interviews conducted with selected government officials whose position and experience would enable them to provide useful data on the issues being explore. Some of the main findings of the research was that the interviewers predominantly conducted unstructured interviews and the interviewers had not received any training on how to conduct interviews and carryout the selection process. In addition, the interviewers did not have any standard selection criteria when recruiting academic staff to the college of technology. The research findings will help administrators in Oman to improve the recruitment and selection process of academic Staff.

**Keywords:** Recruitment and Selection; Selection Practices; Selection Criteria.

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### **1. Introduction**

Recruitment and selection (R&S) is necessary in every organization, whether to replace lost employees or to serve business growth (Torrington, Hall, Taylor & Atkinson, 2011). It is an essential element of human resource management (HRM), whatever the sector, structure or size of the organization (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). The development of new technology has brought rapid change to the field of R&S, particularly in terms of assessing potential applicants (Searle, 2003). It has been indicate that the acceleration of globalization is not limited to the transfer among nations of products and services, but also encompasses management know-how and practices.

In higher education institutions, the academic staff comprises the largest segment of the workforce. In Oman in general and particularly in its colleges of technology, there is a growing requirement for the recruitment and selection of academic staff due to the rapidly increasing enrolment of students to the College of Technologies in Oman. Indeed, this requirement can be expected to increase further as the Government encourages continued expansion in higher education (i.e. universities and colleges). At the same time, the recruitment of academic staff in higher education

has undergone substantial changes in the past years and is likely to have contributed to the tightness of the academic labour market.

During the past four decades, Oman has undergone rapid change, administratively, politically, technologically, economically and educationally, in order to meet the needs of its changing society. As oil revenues have increased, the Omani Government has found itself obliged to act in several fields, such as widening education opportunities, health care, housing, the introduction of social and economic changes and improving the standard of living of its citizens. In response to a lack of human resources and of technological and organizational know-how in the Sultanate, the Government has taken two major strategic decisions, the first being to depend on an expatriate workforce through recruiting human resources from outside Oman and to import technology and organizational know-how from abroad to help to initiate the transformation of Omani society. The outcome of this strategy is reflected in the presence of a substantial non-Omani workforce in various organizational systems and at many levels. The second strategy was then to develop Omani human resources, technology and organizational know-how, in order to replace the imported ones and to continue the development and growth of the national economy. Alongside the nurturing of Omani systems and resources, there has been a simultaneous development of the technological education sector.

## **2. Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The overall aim of the research reported in this thesis is to study the current practices of selection of the academic staff in the MOM Colleges of Technology in Oman. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives have been developed:

- To analyze the views of the officials concerned on the methods and criteria of the current job selection practice.
- To investigate the determinants that impact on job selection in Oman.
- To identify the determinants of using recruitment agencies in recruitment and selection in Oman

## **3. Research Questions**

In order to achieve the aim and the objectives of this research, the following questions have been posited for exploration:

- What are the views of the officials concerned regarding the current job selection practices for academic staff in the MOM CTs in Oman?
- What criteria are used by the MOM in selecting academic staff for the CTs in Oman? How are these criteria implemented?
- Why does the MOM use recruitment agencies to recruit academic staff for the CTs?

## **4. Literature Review**

According to Taylor (2010, p159), “The terms recruitment and selection are often considered together, but they are in fact distinct human resource management activities. While recruitment involves actively soliciting applications from potential employees, selection techniques are used to decide which of the applicants is best suited to fill the vacancy in question”. Pilbeam and

Corbridge (2006) explain recruitment as a process designed to attract suitably qualified candidates to fill a particular vacancy in an organization, from whom the organization can appoint a competent employee. Selection, on the other hand, is the method and techniques used to choose and appoint that competent person.

### **Selection Methods**

Selection methods can be said to constitute a two-way process, in that a number of candidates first select the organization and the organization then selects the successful candidate from among those who have applied. The organizational selection process, with which this section is mainly concerned, is usually subject to an evaluation carried out at three levels, to “fit with the organization; fit with the department and team and fit with the job itself” (Martin, 2010, p.234). It is also crucial to consider factors such as appropriateness, the numbers involved, time and cost when choosing a selection method (ibid). Beech and McKenna (2002, p.151) describe selection as the “final stage of the recruitment process when a decision is going to be made on who the successful candidates will be”. Wilk and Cappelli (2003) state that the characteristics of the work and the levels of pay are important when choosing a selection method

Recruitment and selection in most countries are covered by discrimination legislation. Irrespective of such legal obligations, Thomson (1997) states that to predict the way that individuals will behave at work and whether they can perform well, it is important to set up a fair selection process. Therefore, organizations must be clear in terms of the relationship between the methods used and the job. It is particularly important that applicants are treated respectfully (Mathis, 1991) and that the process is systematic, to ensure fairness. In this respect, the job description and personal specification should constitute the blueprint for selection (Meneses and Kleiner, 2002), since this will allow for an effective comparison of one candidate’s qualifications for the job against others (Fong and Kleiner, 2002). Also, fair treatment of applicants is essential in the selection method and in the R&S process as a whole, because a positive reaction on the part of recruits will motivate them and will reflect positively on their performance (Hausknecht et al, 2004).

### **Screening**

Screening, which usually occurs at the early stages of the selection process, is needed to establish whether candidates meet the minimum criteria or qualifications to be considered for the next stage or can be screened out. There are many advantages in such screening, such as reducing costs and saving time for both employer and applicants. This should result in more efficiency in processing applicants. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to develop and implement screening programmes (Catano et al 2009). Effective screening practices are very important as confirmed by Papadopoulou, Ineson & Williams (1996), who note that screening plays an important role in the interview. Pre-employment screening is thus necessary, particularly in the interview, and should not be considered optional. The organization should consider what types of information it wishes to gain from a thorough screening of all applicants, how to gather it and what to do with it once it is received (Engleman and Kleiner, 1998).

Torrington et al (2011) warn that it may be difficult for organizations to shortlist candidates for interview fairly and objectively, particularly from among a large number of applicants. Problems which may arise include inadequate specifications of the criteria required or intentionally large-scale recruitment exercises. The authors suggest three ways of overcoming these difficulties,

which can be used in combination or separately. Firstly, a panel of managers may carry out the shortlisting. Secondly, as advocated by Roberts (1997) and Wood and Payne (1998), a scoring system may be employed. The third suggestion is that applicants may be shortlisted electronically, using a software system. The shortlisted candidates can then be interviewed.

### **Selection Interview**

Dessler (2008, p.254) states that the selection interview is “a procedure designed to obtain information from a person through oral responses to oral enquiries”. According to Jean and Barclay (1999), it consists of a discussion between one or more interviewer(s) and interviewee(s) with the aim of finding out as much relevant information as possible on which to decide on the best candidate for the job.

Taylor (2010) agrees that the interview is not only conducted to enable the interviewer to predict candidates' future performance of the job. He cites Herriot (1989) as outlining three key objectives for selection interviews. The first is for them to function as evaluation tools. The second is the 'mutual preview', which gives the applicant and the employer the opportunity to meet face to face to exchange information. This is essential in recruitment and selection. The third objective is negotiation, i.e. communicating with each other before issuing an acceptance letter or signing a contract. This cannot be carried out except through an interview. Anderson and Shackleton (1993), cited in Taylor, (2010) suggest that the issues to be discussed in negotiation may include start date, relocation procedure and allowances, training provisions and all other terms and conditions of employment.

According to Dessler, (2008) the interview, despite some criticism, remains the most commonly used tool in the selection process, a fact confirmed by the CIPD Annual Survey Report (2009). In the case of Britain, there are many studies which suggest that the interview remains the most popular selection method, whether in the public or the private sector (Robertson and Makin, 1986; Shackleton and Newell, 1991; Williams, 1992 cited in Barclay, J.M 1999). Taylor (2010) believes that the interview will continue to be the most popular tool used in selection methods and that the cost of this technique will remain low.

### **Methods of Conducting an Interview**

The aim of the interview process is to select the best candidate for the job; hence planning the selection interview is crucial (Tyson, 2006). Armstrong (2009) argues that interviews should be planned, timed and prepared well before they take place, since this helps to ensure that they are conducted professionally and favours quality outcomes. According to Pearce (2007), certain steps must be followed at the start of an interview, which should be on time as planned: interviewees should be greeted as soon as they enter the interview room, put at ease, introduced to the selection committee members and have the interview process explained to them. The next step is to allow them to talk about themselves by inviting them to indicate why they have applied for the job (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994). Above all, the interview must be a smooth encounter which gives the appearance of a professional exercise. It is important to plan properly, discuss the structure of the interview with all selection committee members and determine what questions to ask and when (Pearce, 2007).

The literature emphasizes that all interviewees are entitled to sufficient time to express themselves and that interviews should be brought to a polite and unhurried conclusion for all candidates, whether suitable or otherwise (ibid). The way in which the questions are asked is important, as are any tests which are administered; interviewers should be skilled in listening to the answers provided and in picking up on any particular issues that need to be probed further (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994).

### **Types of Interview Question**

The questions asked in interviews must be prepared carefully and the appropriate type should be decided in advance. Armstrong (2009) suggests the use of open questions so that a full response is promoted. Also important is the way in which the questions are asked and any tests are administered (Hackney and Kleiner 1994). Salgado (1999) argues that it is better to focus more on past behaviour than on future behaviour when asking questions, since this strategy is more valid in terms of the information it yields. Furthermore, questions should be related to the job and should enable comparison of answers from different candidates, so the same questions should be asked of all interviewees (Pearce, 2007).

### **Evaluation and Decision-Making**

Cole (2003) argues that the selection interview should lead to a decision as to who is the best candidate for the job. However, various studies have shown that some weaknesses may be found in selection interviews (Hunter and Hunter, 1984; Reilly and Chao, 1982), since interviewers may stereotype candidates, place the wrong emphasis on negative information and make it very difficult to discount the primacy and similarity effects (Anderson, 1992; Taylor and O'Driscoll, 1995). Thomson (1997) states that making a decision, towards the end of the R&S process, is as important as all the steps preceding it, so the decision must be rational, explicable, unbiased and—as far as possible—founded on objective criteria. Stewart and Brown (2009) identify two main factors in making strategic selection decisions: the balance between a job-based fit, achieved by matching an employee's knowledge and skills to the tasks associated with a specific job, and organization-based fit, achieved by matching an employee's characteristics to the general culture of the organization.

## **5. Research Method**

Saunders et al (2009) argue that the chosen strategy should enable the researcher to answer the research question(s) and meet the stated objectives of a study. It is not particularly hard to choose a research strategy, since the focus of the research generally suggests which one to adopt.

Yin (2009:9) lists five different types of research strategy: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history and case study. The case study method is defined as “a research strategy which comprises an all-encompassing method, covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (ibid). Velde et al (2004) argues that a case study strategy is appropriate if the aim of the research is to conduct an intensive study of a phenomenon within its total surroundings. The case study was selected here to gain the depth of understanding necessary to investigate the current R&S practices in respect of the MOM CTs' academic staff.

The question then remained as to whether to choose a single case or multiple cases. Yin (2009) suggests that the single case study can be used to determine whether a theoretical proposition is correct or whether some alternative set of explanations may be more relevant. An important consideration, according to Voss et al (2002), is that whilst a single case study offers greater depth of understanding, it places limitations on the generalisability of conclusions drawn and may lead to bias if the researcher misjudges the representativeness of a single event and exaggerates easily available data. It was decided to limit the present study to one case, that of the Ministry of Manpower CTs, the respondents being the officials concerned with the R&S of their academic staff.

### **Data Collection Methods**

It is possible to use a variety of methods to collect the data in an empirical study. If the study uses a qualitative methodology, the researcher will emphasize meanings and experiences related to the phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

It was decided that the main method of data collection would be interviews conducted with selected government officials whose position and experience would enable them to provide useful data on the issues being explored. Other data sources such as document analysis and direct observation would then be used to enhance the validity of the study and reduce bias.

The semi-structured interview was used in the research because it helps in collecting opinions on themes that featured in the literature review and to pose questions associated with these. Easterby, Thorpe & Lowe (2004), recommend the use of semi-structured interviews when it is necessary to understand the constructs that the interviewee uses as a basis for the researcher's opinions and beliefs about a particular matter or situation.

Kumar (1996) comments that semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to explore in depth the issues under investigation by interacting with interviewees and that flexibility is possible because the interviewer has the freedom to ask associated questions as they come to mind. Burgess (1993) argues that the semi-structured interview gives opportunities for the interviewees to develop their answers outside the structured format. In these situations, interviewees are given the freedom to express their feelings and thoughts; hence, rich data is more likely to be secured than by the use of an inflexible questionnaire (Hagan, 2000)

An additional and important justification is the fact that the semi-structured interview technique has been used by many Arab researchers to conduct empirical work and has been found to be a very successful approach in Arab organisations, where people prefer to talk rather than to complete written questionnaires (Al-Ali, 1999; Al-Faleh, 1987; AlRasheed, 1996; Mousa, 2005)

In addition to semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis was used to support the interview data and to provide a means of triangulation. The relevant documentation used in this study comprised files, reports, minutes of meetings, articles, newspapers, unpublished reference documents, memos and proposals.

The researcher had also used direct observer, since this was considered to be less problematic from an ethical standpoint and provide rich data and insights into the nature of the phenomena observed.

For this research, the most reliable data was considered to be obtainable from those officials concerned with R&S in the MOM CTs, e.g. directors, experts, managers, deans, assistant deans, academic department heads, academic section heads, heads of human resources departments and others involved in the R&S process from planning to the last stage.

Questions included in the interview protocol were prepared on the basis of issues emerging from the literature review. The protocol was divided into six sections, intended to gather comprehensive information and thus enable the researcher to obtain a genuine picture of the selection practices and to achieve a better and deeper appreciation of these. Additionally, it was understood that this classification would assist in both the data collection and during data analysis.

The actual case study started with the semi-structured interviews during the first week of November 2010 and continued until the first week of January 2011. A total of forty four interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The researcher conducted all the interviews personally, either in the participant's office or in a designated meeting room on the college premises. The time and place of each interview was decided according to the interviewee's convenience. In order to create a conducive atmosphere for the interview and develop mutual trust, the official letter from the Ministry of Manpower authorizing the research

While conducting the interviews, the researcher was able to use informal direct observation and to access certain important documentation in order to enhance the reliability of the interview data. Direct observation was used as a supplementary method of collecting data during the conduct of the interviews, hence the researcher was an observer rather than a participant and this method of data collection was limited to minor observation of some activities over a short time during the field study.

## **6. Data Analysis**

Pattern-matching, is considered one of the most desirable strategies for data analysis (Trochim, 1989; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Yin, 2009) and was adopted in this research, as it compares an empirically-based pattern with a predicted one. Explanation-building was also used to analyse data, because during the data collection process, unexpected patterns emerged which needed to be assimilated.

## **7. Research Findings**

### **Type of Interview Used**

Dessler (2008:254) states that the selection interview is “a procedure designed to obtain information from a person through oral responses to oral enquiries”. Thus, it represents a discussion between the interviewer(s) and interviewee(s) aimed at finding out as much relevant information as possible on which to decide the best candidate for the job. The basic question asked in the present research about the type of interview was: “What type of interview is used in the selection process and why?”

Interviewees reported that the Ministry of Manpower followed the rules and regulations of the Ministry of the Civil Service. For example, M1 explained the interview procedure in respect of the

recruitment of academic staff in these words: “According to my knowledge, the majority of the interviews conducted to select employees in the Civil Service are unstructured. I believe that this type of interview is the most suitable, since it enables us to be more flexible.”

However, the literature suggests the use of structured panel interviews (CIPD, 2004), indicating that up to 85% of public sector organisations use this approach for expediency and consistency, so the method used in Oman is unorthodox in this respect

Such drawbacks of the unstructured interview were alluded to by M2, who said: “The unstructured approach is used in all the interviews that are conducted in the selection process, but frankly speaking I feel this type of interview is not the most suitable type, because it lacks good organisation of the interview process.” A1 added: “The type of interview used in the selection process is determined by the head of the committee, but sometimes a discussion is held between the head and committee members regarding the type of interview, but the most common type used is the unstructured one.” On the other hand, B2 stated that in his experience, “the type of interview used is decided by the head of the interview committee, and he doesn’t ask for the opinion of the committee members”.

A2 believed that committee members should be involved in the decision, wondering “why only unstructured interviews are used in the selection process”. C2 seemed to have the answer to this question, suggesting that “unstructured interviews are used because they create the environment for nepotism. For example, in one of the interviews I attended, I noticed that one of the interviewees was asked very easy questions, and this was because she was known to some of the interviewers.” D3 provided another answer, that unstructured interviews allowed the panel members “to be more flexible. In other words, the interviewer can leave the interview room at any time during the interview. I saw this practice myself when I was selected to participate in some interviews. Frankly speaking, I didn’t feel that the interviews were organised.”

### **Types of Interview Questions**

The questions asked in interviews must be prepared carefully in advance and they must be of the right type. Armstrong (2009) suggests the use of open questions so that a full response is promoted.

In pursuing the issue of questioning, the research participants were asked: “What type of interview questions do you ask job applicants during the interview and why?” Their responses indicated that open-ended questions relating to both general and specialised issues were commonly asked. M1 explained this:

“In order to generate responses and rate the appropriateness of candidates for the job, open-ended questions are used to enable the committee members to evaluate the candidates properly and select the most suitable candidate.”

Structuring the questions helps in organising an interview, since as A1 indicated, “I have headed the interview panel more than once, and the interviewers were divided into two groups, the first handling general questions and the second handling the specialised questions”. However, in the experience of C2, “job-related questions are asked if someone from the specialisation is involved in the committee, but general knowledge questions and intelligence questions are rarely used.”



However, A2 did state that questions were asked to identify the capabilities of the candidate in terms of general education and teaching skills:

“The panel asks general questions to probe the applicant’s knowledge and skills. Specialised questions are handled by those who have the same specialisation, but, for example, once it happened that there was no one available from the specialisation in the committee and the head of the committee called one of the staff having a similar specialisation to the candidate and he conducted the interview by telephone.”

The point is made by Kroeck and Magnusen (1997) that telephone and video-conference interviews may disadvantage candidates, as some prefer face-to-face encounters. This may or may not be a problem, but what did emerge clearly is a lack of standardisation in the interviewing process, since in some interviews the emphasis was said to be on general knowledge, while in others it was on specialised knowledge, which in itself seems to be a haphazard distinction, depending on the quality and availability of interviewers. Contrasts can be seen in the following responses:

B4: “I was involved in one of the selection committees where one of the interviewees was applying for a post in Information Technology. None of the committee members were from the same specialisation and it was not possible to get anyone by telephone. Finally, the head of the committee asked general questions and the candidate was selected.”

B3: “It happened more than once that no one was available from the same specialisation, but it was difficult to get in touch with anyone by telephone. It was very difficult for us to decide whether to select the candidate or not without having someone from the specialisation, but we ended up selecting the candidates based on their personality and the answers to the general questions asked.”

### **Conduct of the Interview**

The aim of the interview process is to select the best candidate for the job; hence planning the selection interview is crucial (Tyson, 2006). The following question was therefore asked of participants: “How do you plan the interview?”

M1 stated that planning was done in three stages: “the opening stage, which aims to build up a relationship, set the scene and put the candidate at ease, done by the chairperson; the second stage, which is designed to evaluate the applicant and the last stage, which is designed to close the interview.”

Effective planning will be reflected positively in the result of entire interview process. In this regard, M2 affirmed that “interviews are planned prior to starting. The head of the committee is responsible for explaining the plan to the panel members”; but M3 pointed out that this was not always the case:

“Sometimes interviews are conducted without any plan; for example, in one interview the head of the panel didn’t even attend because he was asked to be at an urgent meeting elsewhere, and the interview was conducted without him, which had a negative effect on the whole process.”

According to Pearce (2007), certain steps must be followed at the start of an interview. It should be planned to start on time, interviewees should be greeted as soon as they enter the interview room, they should be put at ease, introduced to the selection panel and apprised of the interview process. The next step is to allow the candidate to talk about him/herself by inviting him/her to indicate why s/he has applied for the job (Pearce, 2007; Hackney and Kleiner, 1994). Above all, the interview must be a smooth encounter which gives the appearance of a professional exercise.

### **Evaluation and Decision-Making**

As Cole (2003) argues, the selection interview should finish with the decision as to who is the best candidate for the job. However, various studies have shown that some weaknesses are found in selection interviews (Hunter and Hunter, 1984; Reilly and Chao, 1982), since interviewers may stereotype candidates, place the wrong emphasis on negative information, or not be able to discount primacy and similarity effects (Anderson, 1992; Taylor and O'Driscoll, 1995).

Given these considerations, the participants were asked this question: "How do you decide to select the candidate?" One response was that a rating form was used in some interviews; for example, M1 reported:

"A form is used when interviewing candidates through the first recruitment and selection channel. This form contains some points related to the candidate's personality, knowledge of the specialisation and ability to communicate in English. The head of the panel discusses the outcomes of the interview with all the members, and then the decision is taken. The selected candidate is informed by the personnel department later. As for the second channel, no form is used. The outcome of the interview is discussed by all the panel members and the head of the panel informs the representative of the agency about the final decision."

The general consensus was that whilst the head of the panel discussed candidates with panel members, he essentially made the decision; as D8 said: "I have been involved in a selection panel and had the chance to ask questions, but my opinion was not sought as to whether I thought the candidate was eligible or not."

### **Notifying Applicants**

Speedy notification of the result of an interview is essential to maintain a good image for an organisation, and as Tyson (2006) notes, all interviewees should receive written notification, whether of acceptance or rejection

When asked the questions: "Do you give feedback to all applicants?" and "How do you inform the applicants?", the majority of participants indicated that they were not involved after the actual interviews, and that responsibility for these tasks lay either with the Personnel Department of the MOM, if recruiting through the first channel, or with the RA, if the second channel was used. A typical comment on this issue is that of A1: "The college is not involved in this process in either channel of recruitment; we are only involved (on some occasions) in evaluating and approving the CVs and conducting the interviews."

Applicants were informed of the outcome by email and telephone in the case of recruitment via the first channel. M2 explained:

“There is no formal communication between job applicants and the Ministry before the commencement of the selection process. Communication between the two parties is restricted to public advertisements. If the recruitment is carried out through the first channel, those applicants who pass the initial test are invited to attend an interview and demo class, and whoever passes the interview and demo class is informed that they have been selected for the job. The applicants who are selected are informed by email and telephone, whereas unsuccessful applicants are not informed.”

Applicants were given no indication of where or how to learn about the results of an employment interview; they would often call the college to enquire, but find that the management had no information. On this matter, A4 said: “Candidates sometimes call us to ask about the result of their interview. We feel that we are in a bad situation, as we know nothing about the decisions taken regarding which applicant will be working in our college. Therefore, we feel it is important to involve the college management in this process.”

### **Background Check**

Participants were asked the question: “How do you check the background of the selected candidates?” Again, many reported that they had no idea about this process; it emerged that it was managed by the MOM, recruitment agencies and the Royal Oman Police. According to M2, “the Police and the Internal Security Units carry out background checks on the selected candidates”, while R1 added: “This task is carried out by the police and by the internal security in Oman, since a visa has to be issued for the selected candidate to enter the country. There are cases which are rejected by the police.” According to Banfield and Kay (2008), all types of organisation are increasingly checking the eligibility of potential employees to ensure that they do not have a criminal record.

## **8. Analysis of Data and Discussions of the Findings**

### **Selection Process**

This section discusses the views of respondents concerning the current practices of selecting academic staff in the MOM colleges of technology, along with an analysis of the data gathered from documents and the researcher’s direct observation, all in light of the results of the literature review.

### **Type of Interview Used**

Stewart and Brown (2009:1125) state that “the biggest differences between types of interviews concern the amount of structure.” All the interviewees in the present study reported that the unstructured interview was the type most commonly used in selecting academic staff for the CTs. According to Huffcutt and Arthur (1994), McDaniel et al (1994), Wiesner and Cronshaw (1988) and Wright et al (1989), the validity of different types of selection interviews has been evaluated by various studies. Indeed, several meta-analyses have demonstrated that structured interviews have more predictive validity than unstructured ones. Other researchers have found that structured interviews are predominantly used; for example, CIPD (2004) reports that up to 85% of public sector organizations use this approach because of its expediency and consistency.

The observation of some interviews conducted to recruit academic staff to the CTs; showed that these were unstructured and that they were negative consequences of this approach, such as a lack of organization for the process as a whole and of clear preparation for the interview itself. An important point about unstructured interviews was made by one respondent who said: Unstructured interviews used but in my experience it difficult to work with this type of interview because many of the committee members lacked the skills required.

Other respondents reported differences in the criteria used when selecting academic staff in the CTs, reflecting a clear imbalance in the mechanisms applied and an absence of logical justification for these differences. Lunenburg (2010) recommends that selection interviews be structured, with questions written in advance, asked of all job applicants and the responses assessed on a standardized rating scale, to ensure fairness.

### **Interviewer Training**

The respondents stated clearly that the training of interviewers was of importance in selecting academic staff. This reflects the importance regarding the need to train interviewers before involving them in the selection process. Huffcutt and Woehr (1999) argue that positive differences are created in interviews when the interviewers are trained, irrespective of the amount of structure to the interview, while Sulsky & Day (1992) state that training the interviewer has been found to lead to improved accuracy and personality judgment.

This study found that no training courses or even workshops were provided for those who conducted selection interviews. Furthermore, some of those selected to conduct such interviews were very junior and quite new to the college concerned, thus lacking sufficient information about the college as well as adequate interview techniques. This result is also contrary to the assertion in the literature that interviewers must have the capability to represent the organization, as applicants often judge the potential employer on the basis of the quality of the interviewers, who are seen as typical employees of the organization and from whom candidates pick up cues about friendliness, competence and formality (Eder, 1989; Townley, 1991).

The study found (section 5.5.3) that some selection interview questions were not related to the specialization required of the applicants, because none of the members of the panel shared that specialization, with the result that they were unable to evaluate adequately the applicants' competence for the job. Pearce (2007) argues that questions asked to the applicant should be related to the job and that to enable comparison of answers from different candidates, the same questions should be asked of all interviewees.

The findings of this study indicate that interviewers faced difficulties in composing questions related to the candidate's specialization because no appropriate job analysis had been done. Thus, Chang and Kleiner (2002) argue that factors such as job analysis, job descriptions and person specification are very important in most of the stages of R&S, including the compiling of selection interview questions related to job duties, minimum qualifications required and appropriate skills. Murton et al (2010) add that job analysis helps interviewers to probe for clarification.

### **Decision Making**

The present study found that no common standard selection criteria were used in the selection of academic staff in the CTs; instead, each selection committee used its own decision-making technique. This suggests the possibility of subjective factors influencing the decision. Thomson (1997) notes that the selection decision, made towards the end of the R&S process, should be treated as being as important as the rest of the entire process; the decision must be rational, explicable, unbiased and based as far as possible on objective criteria.

The present study found, however, that a selection form was not always used, which reflects negatively on the standard of evaluation among all the applicants. The variable procedure observed in the study was also in contrast with other aspects of the good practice of selection decision making highlighted in the literature. For example, Lunenburg (2010) argues that to make a valid and accurate final decision, it is essential to facilitate accurate comparison among all the candidates in the interview, so a written record giving details of the candidates' responses and impressions must be prepared in every interview.

Thus, the lack of standard selection criteria indicates that the current approach to decision making is not guaranteed to lead to the appointment of the most talented and suitable candidates for academic posts in the CTs, as it is opposed to the good practice suggested in the literature. A more standardized and objective process is therefore needed.

### **Notifying the Candidates**

The research findings indicate the existence of some weaknesses regarding notifying the candidates; for example, only successful candidates were notified, while unsuccessful ones were not. Such practices will tend to have a negative impact on those who are not notified and thus on the organization's reputation. Notifying all the candidates of the outcomes of their applications, whether in person, in writing or by telephone, is considered to be the last task in the R&S process. Martin (2010: 234) states that "the chosen candidate should be contacted with a formal offer of employment" and Pearce (2007) notes that the other candidates should be informed of their failure once the offer has been accepted.

Another weakness which emerged from the study was that on some occasions, decisions regarding interview outcomes were delayed. Tyson (2006) observes that this is damaging to an organization's reputation, since not only is it dismissive of applicants' efforts, but it deprives them of the chance of constructive feedback (Roebuck, 1996; Anderson, 2004) and serves only to make them feel dispirited.

### **Background Check**

As reported in research findings of the study that the Royal Oman Police, on behalf of the MOM, carried out background checks on all successful candidates who had been accepted for employment. Contributors to the literature including Banfield and Kay (2008) report that organizations of all types are increasingly checking the eligibility of potential employees to ensure they do not have a criminal record. Taylor (2010) notes the need for the regulation of such formal checks and warns that they can be time consuming, to the detriment of the organization and the applicant. Suff (2008) agrees that delays in obtaining access to an applicant's record can cause

problems, such as the withdrawal of recruits who cannot wait for confirmation. Therefore, it is essential for the MOM to expedite this task in order to avoid losing good candidates.

### **Orientation Programmes**

This section discusses the data gathered from interviews, document analysis and the researcher's direct observation concerning the orientation programmes provided to the new academic staff in the MOM colleges of technology, in light of the scholarship identified in the literature review.

Evidence was presented that the existing orientation programme for new academic staff of the CTs was not carried out properly and was not offered to all new members of the academic staff. In this aspect, Robbins and Decenzo (2002) and other contributors to the literature regarding the importance of orientation programmes for new employees, as they provide information about the organization and the work unit, and help newcomers to adapt to the work environment.

The study found that orientation programmes were generally carried out each semester or once a year for newcomers among staff and students, with the purposes of welcoming them to the college and briefing them about the College By-laws, which set out the roles and responsibilities of academic staff and students. However, it also found that some of the new academic staff in the CTs were not given any type of orientation; indeed, some had been asked to teach on the day of their arrival in a new college, with no apparent appreciation of the difficulties involved. Clearly, these indicating a significant weakness in the existing conduct of orientation programmes. Robbins and Decenzo (2002) contend that an orientation programme should cover the organization's history, objectives, philosophy, procedure and rules. Newcomers must also be informed of the duties and responsibilities of the job and of the HRM policies, including the pay procedure and working hours, and they should be shown the organization's physical facilities and introduced to their supervisors and colleagues despite other work.

### **Outsourcing R&S to Recruitment Agencies**

Broadly, the coordination between the CTs and the recruitment agencies was weak, whereas there should be strong cooperation between them to make the selection of talented academic staff more effective.

The recruitment and selection of academic staff at a majority of CTs were outsourced to local recruitment agencies, the main motive being to speed up recruitment and selection compared with the slow and complex procedures of recruiting directly through the MOM and the Ministry of Civil Service (MOCS). Outsourcing was also motivated by the fact that the MOM and the CTs lacked sufficient qualified HR staff competent to handle academic R&S. Authors including Shaw and Fairhurst (1997), Torrington and Hall (1998), Mahoney and Brewster (2002) and Kew and Stredwick (2010) suggest that internal HR departments may well lack the resources to manage R&S processes efficiently and effectively, being unable to select appropriate key talent within the time available. They will thus turn to outsourcing, which Burnes (2000) and Burnes and Anastasiadis (2003) report has become increasingly common since the 1980s, as both private and public sector organizations are driven to seek greater cost-effectiveness in their non-core activities.

Indeed, some interviewees stated that another reason for the MOM to outsource R&S was cost reduction and that this particular HRM function was not considered to be a core task. This is

consistent with the advice of Prahalad and Hamel (1990) and of Croom (2000) for organizations to concentrate on core activities and to reduce costs by outsourcing others.

## 9. Conclusion

The study shows that the MOM colleges of technology used interviews as the main selection method, in addition to CVs, which were used but not very commonly in their R&S processes. Others, such as references and application forms, which are considered essential to the R&S process, were hardly used at all. Likewise, advanced R&S methods such as testing had recently begun to be carried out, but among Omani applicants only. The CIPD (2007) reports that the testing of job applicants remains very common: seventy percent of organizations were found to be using a general ability test, seventy percent a numeracy test and fifty-six percent a personality test, results which were consistent with those of a survey by the IRS (Murphy, 2006).

The study found that the majority of the selection committee members used unstructured interviews in recruiting and selecting academic staff for the CTs. According to some of the respondents, unstructured interviews were used because they allowed more flexibility for the interviewers and because some interviewers were unable to handle structured interviews. Sue-Chan and Latham, (2004) suggests that it is important to focus on structured interviews as more valid and reliable than unstructured ones. Similarly, Boyle (1997) argues that structured interviews are appropriate for the selection of employees because they help the interviewer to identify the skilled applicant, provided that the interviewer is well trained in conducting such an interview. Roberts (2005) contends that unstructured interviews are less effective than structured ones, because the latter are inconsistent, making it difficult for interviewers to compare the candidates and control their use of time, and because it relies heavily on the capabilities and skills of the interviewer. Thus, it is essential to use structured interviews, because of their overwhelming advantages.

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