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A Critical Analysis of the Recruitment and Selection Process in the Ivorian Context

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Abstract:

A couple of theories of human resources (HR) have considerably been emphasized as the most significant variable upon which the life or death of organization revolved. The composition and quality of the workforce are needed to make an organization reach his goals. Consequently, the workforce as a way of improving the skills, knowledge and orientation of that very workforce has significantly attracted attentions of organizational behaviorists and human resource management (HRM) practitioners and organizational performance. However, less is known about the issue of Human Resources (HR) issues in Cote d'Ivoire, a developing country with a developing economy. This current paper highlights the results of finding from a research carried out of 75 enterprises established and operating in Cote d'Ivoire, a West African country for reasonable conclusions drawing on the recruitment and selection process issues of capable applicants in the country in this harsh and competitive business environment. This is the purpose of shedding light upon the "who you know" syndrome, that is the lack of transparency in the recruitment and selection process; the issue of favoritism and nepotism regarding the external recruitment and the internal recruitments in the recruitment and selection process in the Ivorian context.

Keywords: Human resource management, hidden forces, staffing (recruitment and selection)

1. Introduction

There is a myriad of definitions for the issue of recruitment in the literature for human resource management (HRM). Some studies like Bach (2005) defines it as the process of attracting people who might make and organizational contribution to fill a particular role or job. Recruitment is often stimulated when an existing employee leaves. The organizational response is often to try and replace the individual with a replica of that person. Effective and efficient techniques used for recruitment is conducive to organizational performance. So a more systematic response would involve reviewing the post. Whatever the definition, let it be known that, the outcome of the recruitment process in terms of defining the concept does not change. The Ivorian enterprises or organizations are supposed to use some peculiar methods 'who you know' which need to be cleared. We will see, in this issue, the recruitment process in the first part. The second part will shed light upon the background of the study. The third and fourth parts will be devoted to the importance of the study and the research aims and questions. It will be question of research methodology in the fifth part. And the sixth part will show the findings of the research.

1.1. The Recruitment Process

Recruitment can be defined as the process of locating, identifying and attracting capable applicants. Monday and Noe (1993); Crowford (2004) hold that recruitment is the process of attracting individuals on timely basis, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualification; developing their interests in organizations and encouraging them to apply with it. During the recruitment, efforts are made from applicants fully about the selection criteria and the required competences that will lead to effective performance, as well as career opportunities, the organization can provide an employee. The first stage in the recruitment process involves a systematic review of the organization's requirements.

The scope of this fact should not be left out as extant theories have demonstrated that a poor recruitment decision can cost an employer an amount equal to 30 percent of the employee's first-year earnings (Hacker, 1997). These costs can include: lower productivity; potential loss of clients; training costs; advertising costs; recruitment fees and redundancy packages (Smith and Graves, 2002). Taylor (1991) bemoaned the typical way in which individuals were selected, based on 'who you know' or who was first in the queue. Taylor introduced the idea that people should be selected for their particular skills and abilities which should be tested prior to the selection decision. Despite this early emphasis by Taylor, many organizations fail to adopt even the most basic recruitment and selection procedures which would allow them to attract suitable candidates (recruitment) and then make good predictions about the likely 'fit' between particular individuals and the organizational and job requirements (selection) (Newell, 1997).

1.1.1. Recruitment Techniques in Cote d'Ivoire

Barber (1998) posits that effective recruitment is crucial to organizational success. Taylor (1911) asserted that the typical way in which individuals were selected, based on 'who you knew' or who was first in the queue. Ability to do particular job was not, at that time, systematically assessed. Taylor introduced the idea that people should be selected for their particular skills and abilities which should be tested prior to the selection decision. Despite this early emphasis by Taylor, many organizations still fail to adopt even the most basic recruitment and selection procedures which would allow them to attract suitable candidates (recruitment) and then make good predictions about the likely 'fit' between particular individuals and the organizational and job requirements (selection). So after the job analysis issue is covered, the next stage is how to get the 'right' person for the job. This can be done internally or externally.

1.1.1.1. Recruitment from inside

Recruitment from inside makes recruits understand something about how the organization operates and so socialization and learning may be significantly reduced. As Sue (2005) highlights it, internal recruitment is more common among organization that are keen to develop and nurture their own internal talent, along the lines advocated by proponents of a 'soft' human resource management approach. In Cote d'Ivoire, people recruit from within through promotion and transfers. This is done for the organization to capitalize on the costs that it has invested in recruiting, selecting and training its current human resources. In Cote d'Ivoire, in most organizations, employee recruitment and selection follow formal procedures. Objective criteria (education, experience, skills...) are set for the hiring process. Relying on the internal recruitment prevents the organization to bring in 'new blood' with outside experience and it may leave a gap elsewhere in the organization.

1.1.1.2. Recruitment from outside

Bach (2005) highlights that the advantages of internal recruitment are basically the disadvantages of external recruiting. Most of the time, internal sources are often sufficient to supply a suitable pool of applicants; most organizations make use of external sources. External recruitment brings in individuals from outside. In Cote d'Ivoire, newspapers and journals are used most commonly, even if radio and television are also used by some organizations. Advertising reaches a large audience of job seekers. Well-known and specialized organizations like RMO undertake the placement of employees. These organizations are specialized in matching appropriately skilled and experienced employee to job vacancies, along with interview and job search skills training. Educational institutions are also a source of young applicants with formal training. Organizations that are involved in internship projects like, EST-Loko (CAFORPLA), find that universities or vocational training schools provide a source of potential, well-educated human resources (HR) with 'professional' qualifications.

The advantage of this method (external sources) is that new recruits are likely to have a better understanding of the culture and values of the organization, and the nature of the work on offer than the average recruit. The socialization process may, therefore, be shortened for these recruits so that employers can benefit more quickly from the knowledge and skills that these workers bring with them to the organization. As Manwaring (1984) contends, these recruits may be more amenable to management control, not least because the existing workforce may take on some of the responsibility for ensuring the effective performance of these workers they have recommended.

1.2. The Selection Process

Selection is the process of choosing qualified individuals who have relevant qualifications to fit jobs in an organization. Without qualified employees, an organization is in a poorer position to succeed. Consequently, the effectiveness of recruitment has a significant impact on the efficiency of the selection process.

The selection process should provide as much reliable and valid information as possible about applicants so that their qualification may be carefully matched with the job requirement. There are different selections processes in Cote d'Ivoire. As organizations in Cote d'Ivoire need to make a choice between candidates for job vacancies, the most common method used for this selection, decisions, is the interview. Employment and selection interview differ according to the methods that are used. It can be non-directive interview where the applicant is allowed a maximum amount of freedom in determining the course of discussion; or a directive interview that is highly structured with a detailed set of questions on a specifically prepared for. Smith and Graves (2002) admit that increasingly firms are recognizing the importance of selection decisions and are applying other methods that can improve the effectiveness of the process, even though there are still frequent concerns expressed in the literature about the continued use of traditional interview methods.

In Cote d'Ivoire, tests are used to measure applicants' abilities, aptitudes, attitudes, interest or personality in relation to other individuals within the organization in her/his future task. Sometimes, organizations adopt psychological tests to examine the applicant's way of thinking and reacting about topics related to the job specifications.

The first stage of selection method in Cote d'Ivoire is typically based on information provided in standard applications and curriculum vitae (CV) and the majority of candidates have to write clearly their experiences and their knowledge. Sometimes, they have to write about why they choose the organization for applying in a motivation application letter. The human resource manager checks that reference because of possible errors that it may contain. It is also compulsory to have a medical check-up in the armed forces (Police; soldiers; fire service men; custom officers...) even in the public and private sector.

2. Background of the Study

With the increased global competition coupled with enhanced customer expectations, organizations in Cote d'Ivoire need to respond to a rapidly changing global environment. This implies that there can be 'wrong' people; individuals who are a liability rather than an asset because they do not contribute to organizational success and may even harm the organization. According to Newell (2005), this situation occurs because there are differences between individuals, which influence how they perform particular jobs. In Cote d'Ivoire like in any organization in the world, hiring skillful people is of paramount importance. This hiring issue is dependent upon significant and reliable recruitment and selection procedures, which aim to select the 'right' individuals and reject the 'wrong' ones. In a particular context of 'who you know' in Cote d'Ivoire, it is hard to make a difference between 'right' individuals and 'wrong' ones.

3. Importance of the Study

This study is important for human resource management (HRM) practitioners in Cote d'Ivoire. The investment in HRM practices is a driver for moving enterprises from mediocrity to excellence. Therefore, candidates who are willing to take part in the recruitment and selection process for a job offered should have good skills and required qualifications. Recruiters should also be free with no political pressure and pressure from their bosses to conduct the exercise with a view to reject the 'wrong' applicants and select the 'right' ones.

4. The Research Aim and Questions

The purpose or the thrust of this study was to point out or identify the 'who you know' syndrome in staffing, that is, the recruitment and selection process in Cote d'Ivoire as favoritism and nepotism are part of the 'journey. Based upon the research's aims and objectives, the researcher wanted to inquire about the recruitment and selection methods used in enterprises involved in the study (1); the effectiveness of the 'who you know' syndrome in the recruitment and selection process (2) and the extent to which this moral obligation towards prospective applicants or employees can be handled (3).

5. Research Methodology

As we indicated in the research's aims and questions, the scope of this current study was to identify the "who you know" syndrome in the recruitment and selection process in Cote d'Ivoire. To meet our objectives, we targeted 102 enterprises (public and private), but at the time of data collection, only 75 responded representing a percentage of 73.52%, which we found interesting for our study. The enterprises' distribution is shown in figure 1 below.

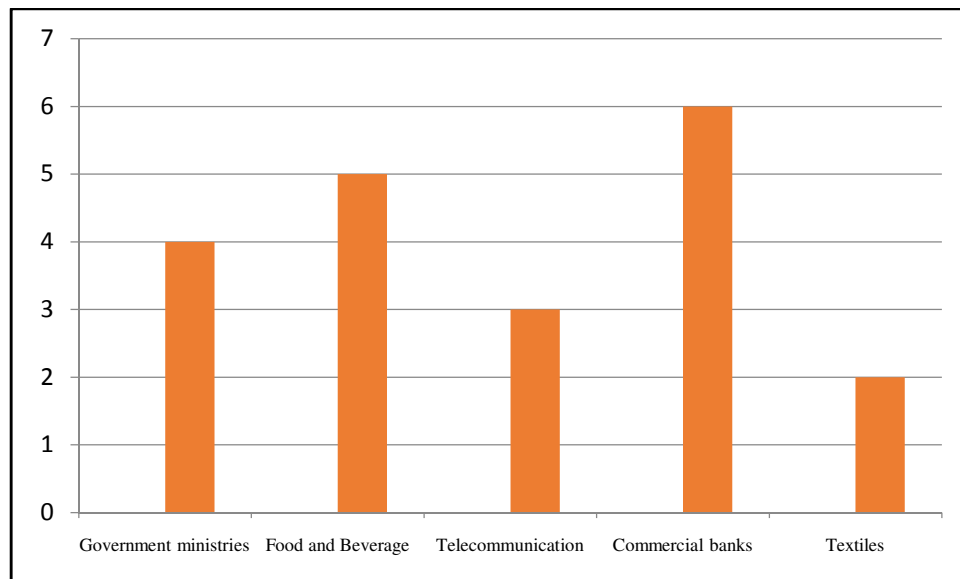


Figure 1: Enterprises' distribution

As we can see from the figure above, forty-five (45) private enterprises were targeted and thirty (30) public enterprises as well. This paper is based upon a qualitative research (interview). The participants both in the public sector and in the private sector were managerial workers (General Managers (25); Deputy Managers (15); Human Resources Managers (35)). For the private sector, we have 13 women and 32 men out of 45 respondents whereas in the public sector, we have 25 men and 5 women out of a total of 30 respondents. Therefore, a total of 75 enterprises (18 women and 57 men) were surveyed.

The participants were explained the scope of the study and with heart full of enthusiasm accepted the interview. What is more, they really sensed the interest of the study and did not really show any reluctance in sharing with us their background and experiences, their companies' operations about the recruitment and selection process issues. The classification of enterprises involved in the study is shown in figure 2.

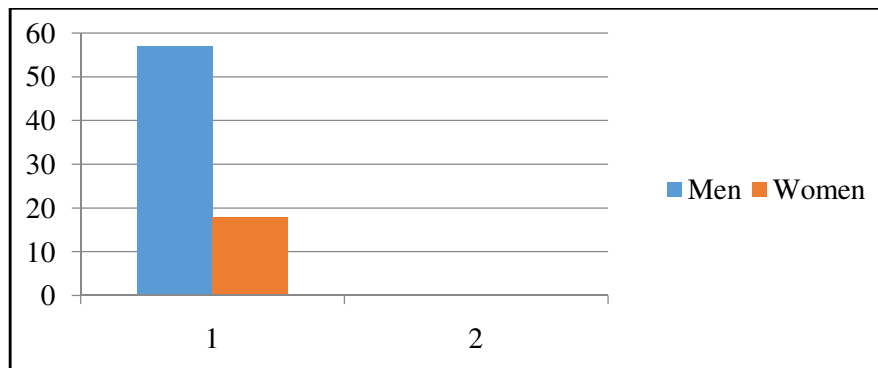


Figure 2: Enterprises' classification

There were four (4) Government ministries; Five (5) Foods and Beverage industry; three (3) Telecommunication services; Six (6) Commercial banks and two (2) Textiles industries.

6. Findings of the Research

6.1. Job Analysis and Job Description

Studies (Bach, 2005) posit that following this review, a thorough analysis of the requirements of the job should be established, often termed job analysis. This is necessary because even those situations where an individual is simply being replaced, there may still be changes in job requirements, especially if the individual being replaced has been with the organization for some time. During the investigation, the researcher inquired about the effectiveness of job analysis (JA) and job description (JD) in the enterprises (75) involved in this current study. 39 respondents out of 75 said "yes", which represented 52% of the respondents for the reality of a job analysis. 36 respondents (48%) posited that job analysis was not effective in their enterprise. The researcher tried to understand deeply but could not get answers to the issue. From the respondents (52%; 48%), the investigator noticed that we still have a 'long way to go' as job analysis is of paramount importance before job offer to match the prospective worker's skills to the required skills for the job offered.

The job description is job-orientated, focusing on the work itself, while the job specification is worker-orientated, focusing on the psychological and behavioral requirements of the job (Newell, 2005). From Newell's, we understand that ideally, for the selection process, both a job description and a job specification should be drawn up and reviewed against the job.

To the issuing question: "Does your enterprise resort to job description in the recruitment and selection process?" 41 respondents (54.66%) said "yes" whereas 34 others (45.33%) responded "no". Here again, the results are mitigated and the investigator was perplex by the time of data collection as, if this practice appears to represent 54.66% (slightly above average) of employers reporting that they always review the job description against the aims of the job before proceeding to the recruitment stage, in line with best practice, this practice should be common within enterprises established and operating in Cote d'Ivoire.

6.2. The "who you know" Syndrome

As stated earlier, recruitment is the process of attracting people who might make an organizational contribution to fill a particular role or job. Recruitment is often to try and replace the individual with a replica of that person. However, in the Ivorian context, candidates as well as their parents have been complaining about a couple of issues affecting the recruitment and selection process. The 'who you know' syndrome is very important in the selection process. A personal relationship /connection are of paramount importance to be hired. What matters is not your skill/experience that is, what you know but rather who you know.

6.3. Nepotism and Favoritism

Wikipedia defines nepotism as the practice among those with power or influence favoring relatives or friends, especially by giving those jobs. Abdalla et al (1998) posit that nepotism and favoritism have been criticized as being unprofessional. In developing countries (of which Cote d'Ivoire is a part), such practices are part of daily life.

Cote d'Ivoire experienced a terrible political presidential election due to dispute over results, which led to military operations from the international military forces who sided with the opposition party of that time with his rebel groups mainly from his geographical area. Once in power, the new president has to reward (according to himself) those who helped him take the seat. So a great deal of those former rebels has been given jobs in various services regardless of their lack of skills and qualification. This situation is termed as "rattrapage" as uttered by the current president himself is from now on part of the Ivorian professional life. "Rattrapage" is a French word meaning "being on the same level now" or "repairing injustice". That alarming situation accentuated the issues of nepotism and favoritism which have become so rampant in the country.

Therefore, the prospective employees face with qualification issues. They do not possess the required qualification and skills to perform jobs offered. The recurrent political interference which manifested out of the desire of politicians to get their relatives in the service is also a moral obligation in traditional African society (of which Cote d'Ivoire is a part) to get a job for a relative. Consequently, the sentiment and other important issues such as nepotism, ethnicity, religion and favoritism are given more importance in terms of employment than merit. So these prospective employees do not really find it necessary to follow the different steps for the

recruitment and selection process. This questions the issues of the skills, qualifications of the selected candidates and productivity. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted on the effects of nepotism and favoritism on employee behaviors and human resources (HR) in the Ivorian context.

For those have no connections in government or even in the examining and selection committee members or board for recruiting and selecting prospective employees in services, they resort to corruptive methods or techniques.

6.4. *The Issue of Corruption*

Corruption has also impacted the recruitment and selection process in the country to the stage that people assert that money is the key to heaven that is, to getting a job or being hired. Even if no study has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of that issue, the researcher must all the same contend that, during the investigation, 25 employees (33.33%) out of 75 indicated that they bribed some managerial workers or some high ranking officials to be hired. They recognized the inappropriate way used to get their job but they refused to mention the names of those involved in that bad practice and the total amount of money their paid for it.

The recruitment process in the Ivorian public administration depends upon the relationship between high ranking officials and the applicants. The situation of “rattrapage” favors more this rampant practice.

6.5. *Moral Obligation*

K'OBongo and Dimba (2007) posit that to understand the implications of cultures within an organization, it is important to understand the basic concept of culture: “... the core of culture is composed of explicit and tacit assumptions or understanding commonly held by a group of people; a particular configuration of assumptions/understandings is distinctive to the group; these assumptions/understandings serve as guides to acceptable and unacceptable perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors; they are learned and passed to new members of the group through social interacting, culture is dynamic—it changes over time (Milliken and Martins, 1989).

The Ivorian culture is characterized by a respect for elders, importance of extended family, collectivism, and deference to authority. The implication of this characteristic of the Ivorian culture is that culture is a collective social phenomenon. In the recruitment and selection process, some hidden forces play a very important role. That is, some prospective employees do not meet the requirements for being hired. As they have connections in government or belong to same political parties as the party in power, they therefore heavily rely on those connections to get hired. Takyi-Asiedou (1993) contends in Beugre (2004) that there is a conviction that to give a job to a fellow tribesman is not nepotism, it is an obligation. It is even a moral obligation to help those tribesmen who are less fortunate to find a job.

According to Beugre (2004), this situation can be explained by two main reasons: First, managers may consider having a moral obligation to help their less fortunate relatives or tribesmen. Providing them with a job is a way of playing their role of social support. Second, by recruiting or helping to recruit relatives and fellow tribesmen, managers may build a power base within their respective organizations. To the extent that these employees owe their jobs to the “benevolence” of their manager, they will tend to remain loyal to him or her.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the ‘who you know’ syndrome, that is the lack of transparency in the recruitment and selection process in the Ivorian context; the issue of favoritism, political interference regarding the external and internal recruitments which are given more attention in terms of employment than merit. Nepotism and favoritism are more rampant in state-owned enterprises. So in order to refurbish sanity in the recruitment and selection process in the Ivorian context, the researcher thinks that it would be important to put emphasis on meritocracy irrespective of applicant’s background and/or affiliation and the issue of political obstruction should be brought to a halt. Consequently, recruiters should be free to make use of adequate methods of conducting the recruitment and selection process smoothly and properly. Good job analysis and job description should be part of the ‘journey’.

The findings of this investigation should bring the researcher in future studies to investigate the effects of nepotism, ethnicity and favoritism on employee behaviors and human resource practices in the Ivorian context for reasonable and reliable conclusion drawing. This current investigation admits some limitations. The researcher investigated the issue of the ‘who you know’ syndrome in the recruitment and selection process in the Ivorian context identifying some sentiment and other important issues such as ethnicity, nepotism, favoritism, corruption, moral obligation and political interference. For future studies, the researcher should identify more primordial issues as well; should resort to sophisticated methods for more credible and different responses for further generalization of the results to be obtained.

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