

## Aids to Personnel Selection

With steadily increasing cost of administration, It is becoming important to improve efficiency in our offices. At work efficiency depends on a number of characteristics. The most important among these are the following :-

- (a) Suitability of the individual and his skill. This generally depends on the suitability of selection, placement and induction practices of the organisation.
- (b) Feeling of responsibility for results. This aspect depends mainly on environment, organisation of work and job design or management practices.
- (c) Effectiveness of supervision depends mainly on the appropriateness of controls, adequacy of support to operating jobs and the administrative human and technical skills of the supervisor.

While recognising that in organisations, the most skilled are not always the highest producers, or the most reliable, the employee must have inherent capability to do the assigned job well. The selection procedure should be able to assess the ability of the applicant and his potential. The procedure must be able to provide sufficient data to selectors to arrive at a good match between the strengths of the applicant and the requirements of the job. This chapter discusses briefly the aids available for selection and outlines the practices followed in some organisations that have the reputation of maintaining high performance standards in the country .

### Selection Process

Selection broadly assumes that

- There are differences in abilities between one person and another.
- Different people have different kinds of abilities.

- People who have interest in certain kinds of work and have abilities or skills that are needed in performing it, are likely to perform it better than those whose skills and abilities are different.

In a somewhat simplistic way, the task of selection is to assess relative degree of the required ability among the applicants. Knowing that the skill alone is not enough for high performance, it is also necessary to assess how well does the applicant fit into the environment of the job and that of the organisation. Senior managerial positions make complex demands on the position holder. The selector has to obtain a variety of data and interpret it to judge relative suitability of each applicant for the job. Behavioural data is less unreliable than test or performance data and therefore judgement of selector on behavioural dimensions is crucial. It is difficult to obtain adequate data on attitudes, values, motives and selectors have to assess these aspects by inference. The steps needed for an effective selection procedure are the following:

### **Pre-selection Preparation**

- Job description to outline the nature of work and the areas of direct responsibility.
- Job specifications to identify the nature of skills, abilities, attitudes, etc. required for the job.
- Features of the environment or special requirements of the job, and uniqueness of the situation.

### **Selection Methods**

The selectors have to choose methods that would help in evaluating the abilities, the skills and overall relative suitability of the applicant. The choice of methods must frequently consist of the following:

- (a) Ability, skill or trade tests
- (b) Interest tests
- (c) Personality tests
- (d) Assignments, problem solving and situational tests
- (e) Group interviews
- (f) Individual interview
- (g) Community or inresidence interview.

Several of these methods are used in combination depending upon the need for data to assess the suitability of the applicant for the job. To strengthen

conclusion of his diagnosis, a medical practitioner requires pathological tests or X-ray or electrocardiogram depending upon his need for data about a patient. The same kinds of choice of data are necessary to decide upon selection methods because each of the eight methods listed above measure different characteristics. The time available for selection and cost of undertaking the exercise and need for data will mainly determine the methods to be employed for selection.

Research has repeatedly shown that standard tests are generally more reliable than individual face to face interviews. Some interviewers are, however, more sensitive and their assessment, at times, is more reliable than any instrument used for assessing abilities of applicants. This kind of extra-sensitive perception is rare, and may not be equally effective in all situations.

Generally, abilities needed at different levels of management are different. Floyd Mann suggests that at lower levels of the hierarchy technical skills are more important; at middle levels human relations and at senior levels, administrative skills are most needed. Assuming, these requirements generally hold true, and I believe they do, the selection methods for each level of hierarchy would have to seek out data that could help selectors predict relative suitability of the applicants for the job.

Research has also shown that people who enjoy power and authority find operating or line jobs more satisfying than specialist or staff positions. People with analytic skills and those who enjoy a spirit of enquiry find specialist or staff positions more satisfying. The selectors would have to assess such personality predispositions. Many studies of professional groups show that each has a distinctive value and attitude orientation. Such professionals will enjoy their work more if the job requires their distinctive orientation. Conflict in their own orientation and that of the job will tend to reduce the persons effectiveness on the job. There are examples of a highly successful accountant or a production manager doing very poorly in the job of a general manager. Studies of accountants, engineers, civil servants etc. show significant differences in their value orientation. Such data again is useful in predicting success in a job.

Research data in behavioural sciences is valuable to selectors in establishing selection criteria and in choosing the kind of selection methods that may be useful for positions at different levels of work. The choice of appropriate selection methods would yield the kind of data needed to evaluate the applicant.

## Some Experiences

Organisations in India rarely prepare job specifications. Selection is often done on a generalised impression of the job by selectors. For lower level positions educational requirements, past experience and age are employed as criteria. For managerial and supervisory jobs, besides knowledge, personality characteristics and propensity to adjust to the culture of the organisation receive attention. But these are also based on impressions of the selectors, and not on job specification or objective data.

A fairly large number of organisations use job descriptions. A few use job specifications as, well. The latter is found more in manufacturing than commercial or government offices. Trade tests are generally used for employment in factories. These tests are often devised by the factory personnel. Standard tests of mechanical, manipulative or other technical skills are rarely employed in India, though some adaptations and data on norms are available.

Standardised tests of clerical ability are rarely used in India. At times general knowledge, or language tests are used. These tests measure general awareness and language familiarity but not ability or skills needed for clerical and secretarial jobs.

Interest tests are used in some organisations. These show the person's orientation for certain kinds of work. Some persons do well in mechanical and some other analytical or in planning work. These tests are useful in identifying individual interests and orientation.

For managerial selection greater variety of methods are used, specially at the level of management trainees, probationary officers or junior levels of managerial hierarchy. The methods most commonly employed for selection are :-

- (a) Written test or a standardised test constructed for the purpose
- (b) Personality test
- (c) Group discussion
- (d) Interviews.

Most selection procedures do not include psychological tests. But the other three are common. Selection for defence services, however, includes personality tests and also a variety of situational tests. In most cases written tests are locally prepared and range from simple essay or general knowledge type to elaborate multiple choice tests. The latter type generally test ability for abstract reasoning, logical thinking, problem solving, numerical ability and the like.

Test construction is an elaborate task. It needs technical know-how. The items to be included and intersectional reliability have to be statistically tested. In India specialists are rarely employed in test construction. Teams should generally include a psychometrist, statistician and subject specialist to develop such tests. In most cases organisations concerned develop their own tests but few take elaborate care needed for the purpose.

As mentioned earlier, most of these tests measure intellectual ability of the person. Many organisations combine sub-test scores, and assign weights to certain segments to determine scores for different kinds of work. In India large numbers respond to advertisements and the tests of the kind mentioned here enable the management to shortlist applicants for further processing through methods that require face to face contact.

A few organisations use personality tests. Such tests provide information about the psychological dynamics of the person. Personality tests can identify the nature of psychological adjustment, the preferred orientation towards people and situations, the level of anxiety and the like. Among the most reliable personality tests are the group of tests known as Projective Tests. Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) developed at Harvard and adapted for Indian population is used by some organisations. It consists of 30 cards with pre-selected pictures. Twenty cards are chosen for administering to the individual. For selection test a smaller number of cards is used. The applicant is required to construct a story around the picture. The respondents project their own selves in constructing the stories. The stories are analysed by a trained psychologist to identify central characteristics of the individual's personality.

Rorschach Ink Blot test is another extremely sensitive instrument for personality diagnosis. It consists of ten cards. The cards are inkblots and the individual is required to state what he sees in the cards. A trained person analyses these responses to diagnose personality of the respondent. There are many other projective tests which have often been used for selection.

All these have to be administered and analysed by trained psychologists. They are time consuming and expensive. In the defence services, Indian version of Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is used in a group situation. In some organisations draw a man test, another projective test, is administered to all applicants who come up for final selection. The relevant aspect of the diagnosis of each applicant is available to the members of the selection committee. In the company where I worked, we gave a projective test (Rorschach) to the final two or three candidates. I distinctly recall that in a

few cases the tests showed certain behavioural characteristics which did not fit well with the job or the company. When we made some enquiries from outside sources we found that the test data was indeed valid. We could not observe the particular patterns of behaviour in fairly detailed interviews.

For selection of middle managerial personnel, selection procedure includes interviews only. In some organisations two tier selection procedure is used. First screening committee recommends a small number of applicants for further processing. A second committee interviews the applicants recommended by the screening committee to make a final selection decision. In some organisations the applicants have to stay for two days or so. This is earlier referred to as community or in residence interview. During this period the applicants meet a number of managers in the organisation, eat with them and attend social and work related activities together. Thus a great deal of data about the applicant is available to selectors.

For selection of senior level personnel most organisations rely on personal interviews. Information about past achievements of the applicant is used for selection decision. This procedure provides somewhat limited data for selection and requires a great deal of inference and judgement on the part of selectors.

## **An Overview**

Except the test results, the data available for selection decision is not always reliable. When selectors have considerable experience in dealing with people more often than not, they are able to make right choices. Yet serious and expensive mistakes are made. Better interviewing methods could provide varied data to make right selection decisions. Very few organisations give enough time for selection. Rarely do organisations analyse the job fully, or the demands it makes upon the person holding the job. Or what kind of leadership would be necessary for the organisation at a particular time. Even the selectors are chosen without regard to the contribution that each can make to improve the choice. Relaxed environment for interviewing is necessary and for this reason two tier selection is found useful. The first tier is able to reduce the numbers to be interviewed and the second tier is able to devote enough time with each applicant to obtain the data needed for selection choice.

Test data being more reliable than interview, selectors would have to make better use of such data than face to face interviews. Now that the need for efficiency is greater, selecting the right person for the organisation

may be considered necessary. In most organisations selection procedures would need review. Appropriate instruments would be needed to provide reliable data for selection decision.

Another common oversight in selection process for senior positions is that requirements of the organisation are rarely analysed in depth. The underlying assumption is that any good manager can manage all kinds of situations. This is not supported by research evidence. Congruence between job requirements and strengths of the candidate is essential. Most successful consulting organisations engaged in personnel selection in the UK spend considerable time to understand the requirements of the organisation before they advertise for the job. We would have to pay special attention to this aspect as refinements are made in the selection process in business organisations.