Strategies for interviews and post-selection

Contents

Introduction 3
Learning outcome 3

Interview strategies 5
Definitions and concepts 6
Role of the line manager/team leader and the HR specialist 6
Limitations of the interview 7
Planning the interview 8
Conducting the interview 11
Interview techniques 13
Taking notes 18

Post-selection strategies 22
Reference checks 23
Specific skills/experience 27
Medical examination 28
Selection report 28
Recommending and not recommending 30

The final phase: offer of employment and unsuccessful applicants 32
Offer of employment (award/agreement employees) 32
Unsuccessful applicants 34
Introduction

In this fifth section in the learning resource, we will focus on the final phase of the recruitment and selection process – the point at which a final decision is made about who will be selected to fill your vacant position and the strategies used to ensure that in fact this person is the best person for the job.

The recruitment and selection process is often described as an ‘iceberg’ – in that, from the applicant’s perspective, only the activities which happen above the surface are seen by them. The interview and the selection decision are the areas in which they are directly involved. What has taken place below the surface is very much linked to the preparation for those two key events. The establishment of the vacancy, development of job description and person specification, skills profile and development of interview plan.

Although the interview is often described as the least valid and reliable predictor of on-the-job performance, it remains one of the most common forms of selection. Poor selection has its consequences, including:

- poor performance
- lower morale
- job dissatisfaction
- higher turnover
- higher absenteeism
- need for increased training
- decreased health and safety awareness
- industrial unrest.

As you will discover in this next section of this module, there are a number of actions you can take before, during and after the interview to significantly improve the selection decision and therefore overcome most, if not all, of the above problems.

Learning outcome

On completion of this section you should be able to:

- select a suitable candidate for a position using a range of techniques.
Reflect on your current knowledge

In order to achieve this outcome you will need to have the following skills and knowledge as listed in the table on the next page.

- Please use the checklist to reflect on how much you know already.
- Tick the relevant boxes.
- The areas that you have checked *I need to learn this* or *I have some knowledge of* are the pages in this section that may require your special attention.

We hope you have got into the habit of reflecting on (evaluating) your skills. It is a skill and attitude that you will find invaluable in your job and in your daily life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge/skill</th>
<th>I can do this now</th>
<th>I have some knowledge of this</th>
<th>I need to learn this</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the roles of the line manager and the HR specialist in the selection process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare and conduct an effective selection interview</td>
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<td>Use appropriate questioning, listening, empathy, note taking and non-verbal skills to effectively open, manage, close and evaluate a simulated job interview</td>
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<td>Produce selection reports, letters of offer and rejection</td>
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<td>Design a reference checking form</td>
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<td>Demonstrate effective reference checking techniques</td>
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Interview strategies

Activity 1

Take a moment and think about the various stages we have already discussed with recruitment and selection and the role played by each of the main players or stakeholders. Some of these might include the applicant, the HR specialist, the line manager or team leader, the agency staff etc.

The flowchart on page 224 of your text will also help you to consider the strategic nature of the selection process and the importance of the stakeholders.

1 Identify each stakeholder.

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2 Briefly make a note of their role in the overall process.

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3 Evaluate the contribution each makes to achieving the outcome they all have in common.

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Definitions and concepts

You have probably concluded from this reflection activity that each stakeholder has a different but still complementary role to others. This role may gain or diminish in importance at the various stages of the process but the implication of the role not being performed well, will have ramifications for all other parts of the process.

For example, a poor job analysis by the HR specialist and/or consultant working with the unit manager will result in an inaccurate job description or person specification, which will then be used to produce an inaccurate advertisement using selection criteria that are no longer appropriate for the job. Applicants will respond to the advertisement, they will be short-listed or culled using the same inappropriate job information, and then one will be selected and appointed to the job – which they will expect to have the scope and opportunities described during the overall process.

After a short time on the job, the new employee soon discovers that all is not as it should be and, if no alternative remedy can be negotiated, will either resign or remain as a very disillusioned employee who may do your company and themselves more harm by staying than by going. We may well ask, ‘How did this happen? What has been the cost to all concerned of getting it so wrong?’

This final phase, as with all others, is critical, and requires all concerned to be competent at performing their role. Planning the interview, conducting the interview, evaluating all applicants, making the final decision and documenting the process are all part of what is required to achieve the desired outcome.

Role of the line manager/team leader and the HR specialist

The initial decision to fill a vacant position or to create a new one is dependent upon the organisation’s human resource planning strategies which reflect the business or corporate plan.
In planning for the recruitment action, the HR specialist relies on the expertise of the relevant manager to assist in the development of the necessary information such as the job description and specification to prepare an advertisement strategy to attract the right applicants. This partnership continues into the selection phase of the process with manager taking an active part in determining the selection criteria and strategies which will most accurately demonstrate the relative competencies of the applicants. At the end of the process, it is the manager who eventually will work with and manage the successful applicant.

The HR specialist may not have the same intimate knowledge about the job as the manager but the specialist is best placed to manage the planning of the interview to ensure that it is a valid and reliable mechanism for predicting the suitability of applicants. They will also monitor the process to guarantee that all actions conform to the various legislative requirements.

**Limitations of the interview**

As mentioned previously interviews, regardless of the type you choose to use, are not without drawbacks, because the possibility of human error can never be totally eliminated. Some of the errors made in interviews include the following.

- Interviewers often make up their mind about an applicant within the first four to five minutes of the interview based on a preconceived view which they formed based on information known to them via the application form or résumé or test results for applicants.
- Interviewers are more influenced by negative aspects such as a poor response to an answer, which the interviewer may use to substantiate the opinion they formed even before meeting the applicant.
- Interviewers tend to either consciously or unconsciously favour applicants about whom they have already formed a positive opinion before the interview. Such applicants tend to perform better because they feel a stronger rapport with the interviewer.
- Interviewers judge the applicant on appearance.
- Interviewers seem to find it easier to explain why an applicant is unsuitable rather than why the person is more suitable than other applicants.
- An interviewee may be given more extreme evaluation when preceded by an interviewee of opposing value.
Activity 2

Given the limitations mentioned above, use the information contained in pages 199–201 of your text, together with your own experience and at least one other text reference to propose strategies to minimise if not eliminate the errors made by interviewers. You might find it useful at this point to look at some of the videos recommended earlier in your guide. These are all available in certain TAFE libraries – ask the librarian at your local college to request a copy on inter-library loan if they are not available in your library.

Planning the interview

Well before the interview takes place, there are a number of decisions to be made and actions to be taken, and these include some of the following.

- Determine the format of the interview: will it be a panel, structured or unstructured?
- Develop the selection criteria and strategies: in addition to the interview will applicants need to prepare for a simulation or role-play, prepare a portfolio etc?
- Prepare the necessary documents such as the interview assessment sheet: care must be taken in the design and use of such forms, as discussed in the previous section. In the event of any internal appeal or EEO-related litigation, these documents, together with the selection report, will need to withstand any rigorous scrutiny
- If it is to be a structured panel interview, determine the various roles of the panel members and the bank of questions and expected responses to be used.
• Determine what information is to be given to the applicant: eg salary options, conditions of employment etc.

• Deciding on a venue: consider seating, lighting, privacy, ventilation.

Some of these issues are discussed in more detail below.

Timing
• Applicants should be given a minimum of three days’ notice to attend for interview.

• Ideally, schedule only five to six interviews per day to prevent overload.

• Avoid scheduling interviews at low energy times (eg directly after lunch and late afternoon).

• The duration of the interview should relate to the position level. A reasonable guideline is 30 minutes per interview, with a maximum of 60 minutes.

• Allow for sufficient time between interviews (eg 20 minutes) to review and note key features.

Location
• Reception area should have clear signposting.

• Interview rooms should be private, with no distractions or interruptions.

• Interview rooms should have convenient facilities (eg chilled water, tea and coffee, proximity to toilets).

• Access should be planned for applicants with a disability.

Environment
• Interview rooms should be comfortable (seating, ventilation, temperature).

• There should be sufficient chairs.

• Furniture should be placed appropriately.

• The selection panel should wear name tags.

• No light should glare in the applicant’s face.

Effective interviewing
• Know the job: the personal attributes, experience, skills and qualifications needed.
• Review the resume or application form.
• Beware of prejudices.
• Ensure questions map against the criteria.

**Activity 3**

Think about your own experiences as an applicant.

1. To what extent is it now obvious to you that the employer planned the interview well?

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2. How could it have been improved?

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3. Do you now feel that you were not successful in being selected for a job because of the employer’s poor planning? What evidence do you have for this?

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Note: Many organisations have value statements that affirm valuing diversity. You should ensure that your selection procedures reflect these values and do not discriminate against gender, race or disability, etc. You may need to ensure that you make provision for accommodating any special needs of applicants at the interview (eg wheelchair access).

Conducting the interview

The essential parts of an interview are:

- **opening of the interview** – introductions, developing rapport, some initial small talk, overview of the interview format
- **body of the interview** – the fact-finding part of the interview, detailed discussion of the job and the applicant’s suitability based on competencies, background etc
- **closing of the interview** – opportunity for applicant to ask questions, details of actions to follow etc.
Activity 4

Have a look at the interview panel shown above – what positive and negative impressions do you form about the scene?

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Forms of interview

*The structured interview*

There are many forms of interview. The most common one is the *structured interview* where set questions are asked of each applicant and then specific questions relating to their application. It is common for there to be a panel. Be careful of the size of your panel. It would rarely be necessary to have more than four people on a panel.
The structured interview aids consistency, reliability, is more time-efficient and comparison across applicants in relation to each competency is much easier. The downside is that the process may be less flexible and the interviewer may tend to dominate with the applicant perhaps overwhelmed by the questions.

**Unstructured interviews**

*Unstructured interviews* can be more relaxing for some applicants and can be tailored to the individual. Interviews of this type are harder to control because the process is fluid and the interviewer may miss important areas. It is also harder to compare different applicants as the issues discussed may not be consistent across applicants. The success of this type of interview is very much dependent on the skills of the interviewer and the nature of the position to be filled. This would obviously be more relevant to entrepreneurial roles such as business development managers.

**Number of interviews**

It is common with entry-level applicants (for positions such as customer service officers), to conduct one interview, including the team leader on the panel. For more senior positions, there will more likely be two interviews conducted, with the second interview panel including someone from the next level of management to the team leader. For more specialised positions, there would generally be at least two interviews held plus an initial interview by an agency.

One of the primary outcomes you should be striving to achieve from the recruitment and selection process is that it is a positive experience for all concerned. Applicants who are unsuccessful in gaining the position will ideally be impressed with the professional approach taken by your organisation and they are more likely to apply for positions in the future.

**Interview techniques**

Different types of interviewing techniques have become popular as well. The current trend is to ask questions that require a behavioural answer, some actual role-plays, or testing which involves the selection of various behaviours over another. When using these types of selection tools you must be open to creative answers or solutions and not be set on one answer.

**Questioning**

Questions are the means by which the selection panel is able to elicit information about the skills, abilities, experience and potential of the applicant not available from other sources. Further, they can be used to
assess the extent of communication and interpersonal skills which are best assessed at interview.

To be effective, interview questions must be short, unambiguous and closely related to the selection criteria. Ideally, they should be open, and focus on the past experiences and behaviour of the applicant. All applicants must be asked a common set of questions, in addition to others that arise in each individual assessment.

Some panels allow applicants to view the questions up to 30 minutes before the interview. Applicants need to be invited to be in attendance earlier and be provided with pen and paper.

**Questioning techniques**

Questions are one of the main vehicles available to you to navigate a course to determine if there is a successful match between the applicant and the needs of your job and, just as importantly, between your job and the applicant’s needs. Different types of questions are used to provide different information depending on the interview approach.

For example, in an unstructured interview the question, ‘Tell me about yourself’, may be the only set question; with spontaneous probing questions used to follow-up on issues raised, such as, ‘When you say that you had a significant impact on bringing in new business, what do you mean by that?’ or ‘Can you give me an example of how you changed the culture of the organisation?’ The following are examples of more challenging questions which may be appropriate for certain jobs.

- Why should I consider you for this job?
- What types of people do you find it most difficult to get along with?
- What does the word *success* mean to you?
- What are the skills you most need to develop to advance your career?
- What have you heard about the organisation that you don’t like?
- What aspects of the job I’ve described appeal to you least?
- What are you looking for in your next job?

It is essential to use appropriate questioning, listening, empathy, note taking and non-verbal skills in effectively opening, managing, closing and evaluating a job interview.

**Questioning style**

- Questioning technique should allow a logical flow, which links subject areas and builds a comprehensive picture of the applicant.
A mix of questions should be used, giving each applicant the opportunity to demonstrate his/her suitability for the position.

All questions should be relevant to the selection criteria.

Questions should be short and unambiguous so as to encourage the applicant to do most of the talking.

The panel should concentrate as much on strengths as on weaknesses.

Questions designed to exert pressure on or stress an applicant are not acceptable. Such questions usually take the form of aggression or bullying, and attempt to show the applicant’s ability to handle themselves when under pressure. This type of stress is not relevant to the stress experienced on the job. This is therefore not the way to assess the capacity to cope with stress.

Note: Questions would be expected to match the level of communication skill expected in the position.

**Behavioural questioning**

The concept of behaviour-based questions stems from an interview technique known as *behavioural interviewing*. Behavioural interviewing is based on the premise that past behaviour can predict future behaviour. Real-life examples are elicited from the applicant and used to determine the presence or absence of job-related skills and to make performance predictions.

Interviewers ask specific questions relating to the applicant’s recollection of how they handled a particular situation. Applicants are asked to provide as much detail as possible about relevant experiences, citing dates, times and locations.

A typical example of a behaviour-based question to test customer service skills might be, ‘Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult person.’

If the applicant is not currently employed, he or she will need to be encouraged to provide relevant examples of transferable skills – for example, ‘Give me an instance of a time when you had to rely on your organising skills at home/when dealing with social or sporting activities.’

Generally, follow-up questions designed to elicit detail would then be asked until the panel is satisfied that they have all the information they need. For example,

- ‘Who was involved?’
- ‘How did this occur?’
- ‘What was your role?’
- ‘What was the outcome?’
Another useful technique is to ask for contrary evidence in order to gain a balanced view of the applicant. The panel may have asked a behaviour-based question, followed by a contrary question, such as:

- ‘What has been your most positive experience with a customer?’
- ‘What has been your most negative experience with a customer?’

Provided they are anchored in the requirements for the position, behaviour-based questions are a useful tool. They ask applicants to back up their assertions with descriptions of their past behaviour. This being the case, applicants may need prompting and some thinking time to come up with their examples. The panel needs to be both patient and persistent in encouraging the applicant to answer.

One effective approach for delivering questions is to allow applicants a few minutes before the interview to look at the written schedule of questions. This gives them the time to organise their thoughts and be more at ease, since they know what to expect.

**Questions to avoid in interviews**

The following types of questions tend not to provide useful data for selection decisions.

**Hypothetical questions**

Hypothetical questions propose a hypothetical situation and ask how the applicant would respond. They tend to elicit slick, textbook answers. For example, ‘If you were in our position, what qualities would you be looking for in an applicant. Why?’ A behaviour-based question or a more extensive case study may be more appropriate.

**Leading questions**

Leading questions that indicate an expected answer do not allow for demonstration of original thought. For example, ‘You do believe that service is of paramount importance, don’t you?’

**Double-barrelled questions**

Double-barrelled questions (questions where two or more parts require an answer) and heavily prefaced questions (those that have a long preamble) confuse applicants, causing them to forget parts of the question.

Interviewers must ensure that they do not prompt the applicant by suggesting responses. Instead, probe by asking for further details or clarification of points raised by the applicant.
Figure 2: An active interview

Activity 5

Comment on the types of questions asked in the scene above. Are there any you would not use, why?

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Taking notes

The aim of taking notes in the interview is to:

- record things that particularly enhance or detract from the presentation
- produce a memory aid
- record information on which to base selection decisions.

Before the interview

It is necessary to plan how notes are to be taken in the interview (e.g., by using charts, tables or key points). Above all, the approach must be consistent for each applicant, and it must be possible to synthesise the information into a panel conclusion, so that an appropriate plan needs to be prepared.

During the interview

It is a skill to keep adequate notes whilst maintaining effective communication. Be polite, and mention that the panel will be taking notes. This shows professionalism and assists active listening.

Notes should be descriptive rather than evaluative during the interview. Be wary of the implications of the timing of your note taking. For example, if you always respond only to incorrect answers by noting down your observation of what has taken place, the applicant will be given clues about how the answers are being received. This can be either an assistance to the applicant which is not necessarily intended, or it can be so off-putting that it could destroy the applicant's confidence.

After the interview

At the end of the interview, a summary should be made of all important information obtained while it can still be remembered. Avoid evaluation until all interviews have been completed.

Additional points

You may find that some unsuccessful applicants may seek feedback from you regarding their application. We have already noted the importance of a professional approach to recruitment for an organisation’s image. If you are giving feedback, be sure to note some strengths of the applicant and restrict the discussion to your selection criteria. Do not be drawn into discussion about other applicants. This is where structured evaluation procedures will support you, if there is any dispute about the process.
Be careful of such things as the halo effect where one factor influences all others. Always try to separate inference from fact. Try not to make assumptions or presume anything. Probing questions should be used to clearly define any uncertainties you may have. Other considerations in conducting selection interviews include:

- establishing rapport
- posture, eye contact, gestures
- no unnecessary interruption of the applicant
- be aware of cues supplied by the applicant
- restate questions, where necessary
- tone and manner
- use silence appropriately
- keep the applicant on track
- applicants should do most of the talking
- smooth and non-interfering note taking
- encourage questions from the applicant
- courteous close
- clear direction regarding the next step in the process.

*Body language* is also an important part of the interviewing process. You may have been told in a communication course that non-verbal communication overrides verbal communication. You should try to read some articles or books in this area to help you decide on the weighting you might give to non-verbal communication.

Again, just a reminder that the interview is commonly seen as the most unreliable tool for selection, as a predictor of success, yet it is also acknowledged as the most widely used.

*All your selection procedures must ensure that the evaluation you make reflects whether the person can do the job.* For many techniques this is based on the theory that past performance is a valid indicator of future performance. The trend towards competency based profiling and selection techniques should bring greater validity to selection procedures.
## Interviewer checklist: Individual self-assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established rapport with the applicant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate introduction completed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye contact established</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aware of cues supplied by the applicant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate non verbal behaviour - posture, eye contact, gestures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No unnecessary interruption of applicant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full message received from applicant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required information gained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation of relative importance of applicant’s comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used re-statement where appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate reaction to messages or behaviour of applicant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate use of full range of questions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Probing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions clearly expressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate checking for understanding of question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning strategy followed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate tone and manner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to bring applicant back to the point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate time/silence for applicant to answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicants encouraged to do most of the talking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Smooth and non-interfering note taking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Absence of biases, <em>halo</em> effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective environment established and maintained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraged questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective and courteous close</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear direction to applicant of next step in process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank applicant for attending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 6

Using the above checklist, take a few moments to reflect on your existing competencies either in interviewing alone or in a panel situation. In this self-assessment exercise, you may find that you have not fully thought about some of the micro skills involved in being an effective interviewer. If circumstances permit, you may also find it useful to observe an experienced interviewer or a panel during an interview. An interview checklist will usually have a comments section at the bottom. What are your comments on your own skills?

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Now that the interviews have been completed, you are faced with yet another important decision – perhaps the most critical of all that you have encountered during the whole process of recruitment and selection.

**Activity 7**

1. It is probably timely to ask yourself at this point just how much more do you know about these potential new employees as a result of your recruitment and selection strategies?

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

2. What additional information do you still require to make an informed decision as to who is the most suitable applicant?

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

3. If you are still in need of further information, to what extent is this a reflection of the ineffective use of strategies adopted up to this point or is it more about needing to introduce additional strategies?

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

   Hopefully, you are in a much better situation to make an informed choice from amongst the final list of applicants. You have now generated
information from a range of sources including the application form, résumé, test results and the interview itself. How well you use this information will have significant impact on you making the right choice of applicant. As your text suggests, at the end of the day, this is not just a simple mechanical process of choosing the person with the best score. It is a combination of many different interrelated factors all of which will influence your final decision. The reference check and the results of a medical examination may be the final parts in the mosaic!

Reference checks

Reference checking or reference auditing has become a critical part of the overall selection process as employers attempt to gather information about the applicant’s background and workplace performance. Although it is still commonplace for applicants to submit a written reference with their application, it is actually discussing the detailed performance of the applicant with the referee which provides you with the most useful information.

Your text clearly outlines the key approaches and issues with reference auditing. Additional details following will further add to your competencies in this area. Whom to contact, what information you can validly and reliably gather and the privacy and duty of care responsibilities in doing so are important to note. A word of caution – be mindful of the source of the information provided and the self-interests of those involved. Some references can be inaccurate due to factors such as limited knowledge on the part of the referee, personal bias, self-interest in either retaining or in some cases wanting the person to leave the company but for all the wrong reasons.

The reference checking process

*Referees*

Referees’ comments can provide a valuable component of the assessment strategy, but for this to be effective it may be necessary to have an additional panel meeting to fully consider the information obtained from referees. The time that is available for this full process of assessment is a practical issue which will have to be decided upon by the selection panel. However, the acquisition of referees’ comments as part of the assessment process should be regarded as normal practice, and exceptions made only in limited circumstances.

Panels have the option of seeking the referee’s comments by telephone or requesting a written referee report. This could be in the form of a faxed list of questions relating directly to the selection criteria. The referee would then be asked to fax the reply. This may be easier for some people to do. Telephone contact will generally elicit more relevant information when the
panel needs to explore particular features of each applicant’s background, work performance, skills, or attitude, which the selection process, particularly the interview, may have revealed as warranting further enquiry.

**Note:** A supervisor should not be both a referee and a member of the selection panel. This may represent a conflict of interest for the supervisor and/or be perceived as possibly favouring the applicant who nominated the supervisor as referee.

Referees’ comments should be written up as part of the assessment report. Written referee reports may be attached to the assessment report. Relevant comments obtained over the telephone should be recorded in the context of the details of information requested. In making recommendations in relation to applicants, appropriate reference should be made to referees’ comments which have been taken into consideration by the panel.

### How to conduct a reference check in three basic steps

**1 Preparing information**

- Prepare list of qualifications and facts to be verified, including relationship of referee to candidate, how long they worked together, duties and reporting relationship.
- Review the statement of qualifications.
- Prepare questions that are relevant to the qualifications of the job being filled.
- Aim for facts, specific relevant incidents and not opinions.
- Review candidate’s file and resume.

**2 Gathering information**

- Explain to the referee your purpose and the time the check will take.
- Follow your prepared questions to stay on track.
- Use follow-up questions to clarify events and get details.
- Keep to the facts and ask for specific examples of incidents.
- Be prepared for silence while the referee thinks.
- Take notes and evaluate later.
- Be alert to unusual hesitations, evasive responses and overly enthusiastic responses.
- Do not forget to ask the *sum-up* question. It is very difficult to cover all areas of an individual’s past during a reference check. Always ask, ‘Are there any concerns or performance issues that a potential employer should be aware of?’
• Do not ask questions that are directly or indirectly discriminatory.  
  (Remember your EEO obligations!)

3 Using information

Do not accept all information gathered at face value. Be cautious of personality conflicts and different work environments. Try to use information derived from several methods to make an overall assessment of a qualification – for example, interviews, written tests, reference checks. When in doubt about a person’s qualifications, check other references if necessary.

The following is one example of a typical reference check form:
Telephone Reference Check Form

Application Name: 

Position Applied for: 

Person Contacted: 

Title: 

Working Relationship to Applicant: 

Company: 

City:  Tel:  

"I wish to verify some of the information given to us by........ (applicant), who is being considered for employment at...........as a/an (position title)."

1. What were the dates of his/her employment with your firm?
2. What was his/her job title and primary responsibilities when he/she started?
3. How did he/she leave your company?
4. How would you describe the quality of his/her work?
5. How well did he/she respond to pressure (eg from high volume, deadlines, multiple tasks, public contact)?
6. How well did he/she plan and organise his/her work, and were assignments completed in a timely fashion?
7. What was the amount of supervision required by him/her?
8. How well did he/she get along with other people (eg clients, coworkers, supervisors)?
9. How did he/she respond to criticism/interpersonal conflict?
10. What are his/her strongest skills as an employee?
11. What areas of his/her performance needed improvement?
12. What was the reason for termination?
13. Would you rehire him/her at the same level? If no. Why not, and for what level of work would you rehire him/her?
14. Did you talk with the employee about the problem?
15. Have you any comments you wish to add?

Would you recommend this individual as a 

References checked by  Date  

Can we share this reference with the employer?  Yes  No

THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME YOUR TIME
Specific skills/experience

In addition to the questions in the form on the previous page which address general performance areas common to most jobs, questions addressing specific duties of this particular position should be included (from critical factors /selection criteria). For example, such questions might cover one or more of the following areas:

- technical knowledge or skills applicable to this type of work
- experience in the applicable professional field
- clerical skills/experience
- lead/supervisory experience
- budget/bookkeeping experience
- fiscal management experience
- computer applications experience (software, hardware, operating systems etc)
- program/project development experience
- writing skills/experience
- interpreting and applying rules and regulations.

Activity 8

Talk to the relevant staff in your organisation and make a note of the attitude and practices adopted in relation to references.

1 How often are references checked – for all positions or only some?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

2 What degree of importance does the organisation place on the information gained from referees?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
3 What strategies are in place to ensure that privacy and duty of care responsibilities are honoured?

Medical examination

An offer of employment may be dependent upon the applicant successfully completing a medical examination. In other types of situations, the employer may not interview an applicant until they have successfully completed a medical examination. It very much depends on the industry, nature of the work and other company specific requirements.

In any case, again there is potential for EEO issues to develop, because this aspect of the recruitment and selection process is not conducted in a professional and equitable manner. Your text provides you with specific details and references to various advisory services that can assist you with this phase of the process.

Selection report

Now that you seem to be in a position to make your final decision, you will need to document the process. Depending on your position in the organisation, and the degree of formality involved, you will need to prepare a selection report. As we have discussed previously, some type of documentation is essential not only for your company’s quality assurance practices but for any interested parties outside the company such as the Privacy Committee or the Anti-Discrimination Board.

The selection report is a vital part of the staff selection process, and must reflect accurately the procedures that have taken place. The selection report must be of equal quality to the rest of the selection process. A good selection report results from a high-quality selection process overall, and indicates that the selection panel has focused on the principal issues that are vital in coming to the best selection decision.
Why produce a report?

A report is produced because it:

- records the recommendation of the selection panel, and the reasons for that recommendation
- seeks the delegate’s approval of the recommendation made
- records details of the composition and proceedings of the selection panel so that compliance with policy can be confirmed
- records details of the panel’s chosen strategy, so that the appropriateness of the assessment measures used can be confirmed
- summarises the respective merits of all the applicants as revealed in their applications, and as revealed by their performance at interview or on any of the other assessment tasks which were used in the selection process
- provides a document which becomes the basis for any post-selection discussions or counselling, and in the event of any appeals against the selection decision, becomes a record of the proceedings throughout the selection process which will be used before the appropriate tribunal.

What is included in the report?

- information on the vacant position (eg title, location, salary range)
- a copy of the approved advertisement
- the position description and selection criteria
- the agreed assessment strategy
- details of the selection panel
- details of the review and cull
- detailed assessments of each applicant, as well as comparative comments
- referee reports and comments
- the recommendation and the evidence which supports the panel’s decision
- a recommended eligibility list, if appropriate
- statistics for EEO reports.

The features of a well-written report

A good report is:

- sufficiently detailed to allow a decision to be made
- complete and well-documented
• open and honest
• concise
• probably written in point-form style
• organised under headings or in tables relevant to the selection criteria
• one which contains evidence which supports its conclusions.

Recommendation and not recommending

The recommended applicant

In the report, the selection committee must comment on and explain the strengths and superiority of the recommended applicant over other applicants in relation to the selection criteria.

It is insufficient to say only that an applicant is the most suitable.

If, for example, an advertisement asks for, ‘sound knowledge of government accounting procedures, experience in supervision and ability to communicate’, there are three basic elements, each of which needs to be addressed in the report. For example:

1. The applicant was able in the interview and in the application to demonstrate extensive experience in government accounting procedures, and answered each of the questions put to him/her concerning government accounting procedures without errors.

2. The applicant displayed extensive experience and good capacity for supervision in an accounting area, by indicating a range of solutions to problems posed, and by indicating how previous problems encountered in an accounting area were overcome. Specific details of the solutions used were supplied, and the panel has checked with referees to confirm that the applicant was responsible for the implementation of these solutions.

3. The applicant satisfied the committee of superior ability to communicate effectively both orally (as assessed by the applicant’s performance at interview), and in writing.

The applicant not recommended

It is necessary to highlight particular areas in which the applicant has failed to meet the selection criteria, where these have not been met. If the essential criteria have not been met, this need be the only area covered. However, it is not sufficient to state that the applicant failed to meet the essential criteria without being specific.
Where applicants meet some or most of the desirable criteria, it is important to isolate and specify which areas were important in distinguishing between the recommended applicant and others.

In some cases, more than one applicant may meet all the criteria, both essential and desirable. The selection panel must decide which of the applicants who meet all of the criteria is to be recommended for the vacant position, and to prepare the report showing cogent reasons for the decision, and citing evidence that supports these reasons.

Eligibility lists

If the quality of applicants is high and the selection committee wishes to recommend a number of applicants, an eligibility list can be created. The eligibility list ranks applicants in order of merit and may be used if the position becomes vacant in the short term.

Post-selection procedures

Your staff selection policy, where one exists, may require that various rules be observed in relation to notifying applicants, performing applicable applicant checks, undertaking post-selection counselling, and dealing with the issues of appeals and grievances. Generally speaking, the applicants should not be notified nor be allowed to enter duty until all checks have been completed and proved to be satisfactory.
The final phase: offer of employment and unsuccessful applicants

As a job offer is part of a legally binding contract, it is essential that you not only read the specific details in your text but also follow the advice of the authors regarding keeping up to date with legislative changes and your responsibilities. When the person to whom the job offer is made accepts the offer, a legally binding contract is made. This contract of employment is the foundation for the legal relationship between the employer and the employee. Each has rights and obligations at common law as a result of entering into the contract. A contract need not be in writing, it can also be oral or implied.

Offer of employment (award/agreement employees)

There is considerable benefit in your business making an offer of employment in the form of a written agreement.

A written agreement states the situation clearly and any questions relating to terms and conditions may be referred back to the written document. Having a written document puts you on sure ground should a dispute arise with your employee about the job offer. Your new employee will be presented with a job offer that is both professional and clear. It makes for a good start to a new job.

In the case of an award/agreement job, it is generally appropriate to have a written agreement in the form of a letter of appointment with a standard set of basic conditions. Reference may also be made to any appropriate award/agreement.

An offer of employment may be made verbally and then followed up in writing with more details. Note that there must be an unconditional acceptance by the person receiving the offer before a contract of employment exists.
As a minimum a job offer should comprise the following information:

- the position and job title
- starting date
- wage/salary
- legal coverage (for example, award)
- status of employment (for example, full time, part time)
- termination of employment provisions
- entitlements (for example, leave provisions)
- any special terms or conditions of employment.

The following is one example of an offer of appointment:
Unsuccessful applicants

As we have mentioned previously, there can be only one successful applicant but how professionally and courteously you communicate with the unsuccessful applicants will have important public relations implications for your organisation. Reflecting on your own experiences with receiving
unsuccessful letters will hopefully enhance your empathy towards applicants who are not being made an offer of employment. Circumstances may prevail where in the near future you may be approaching these same people with an offer and it is therefore in all interests to handle this part of the process well.

In addition to the sample letter in your text, you might like to adapt the following sample letter for your situation.

Letter to unsuccessful applicants

The following is one example of a letter of rejection:

{Company logo/name}

Our Ref:
Date:

{Name of recipient}
{Address}

Dear {name}
RE: APPLICATION FOR POSITION – {Position details}

Thank you for your application for the above position. The standard of applicants interviewed for this position has been very high. I am sorry to advise you that on this occasion, you were unsuccessful. If you have no objection, we will maintain your application on file for reference should a suitable position become available in the future.

If you have any queries regarding the above, please don’t hesitate to call me on the following number(s): [contact number].

Thank you for the interest that you have shown in joining {company name}.

Regards,

Jim Stewart
Human Resources Unit
{company name}

Activity 9

Talk to staff in your organisation and have a look at the style and content of typical offer of employment letters and letters sent to unsuccessful applicants.

Given what you have read about the content of these letters, what is your evaluation of their effectiveness in meeting your employer’s legal obligations as well as maintaining a
professional public image? Write down here ways in which you would modify the wording to suit your organisation.
Check your progress

To assist you in reviewing your understanding of this section, go through the following checklist. Those competencies that you ticked No to or I need to review should be studied again. You can contact your teacher if you need clarification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I need to review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Describe the roles of the line manager and the HR specialist in the selection process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prepare and conduct an effective selection interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use appropriate questioning, listening, empathy, note taking and non-verbal skills to effectively open, manage, close and evaluate a simulated job interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Produce selection reports, letters of offer and rejection</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Design a reference checking form</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate effective reference checking techniques</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>