On-line recruitment methods and implications for diversity management

Valerie Caven and Paul Williamson

Nottingham Trent University

**Abstract**

**One of the key ideas behind on-line recruitment methods is that employers can better manage and control the recruitment and selection process: thus being able to target and recruit the best candidates for the job. Adopting an interpretive approach in the qualitative paradigm, using semi-structured interviews with eight senior HR Managers we identify how on-line recruitment has positive implications towards promoting diversity in the workplace.**

**Introduction**

Online methods of recruitment have been changing and improving at a rapid pace in recent years (Stone et al., 2005: 22). online recruitment’s definition is ‘matching people to appropriate jobs, using the Internet’ (Khan, 2011: 1). The different methods of online recruitment can include corporate websites, job boards, and business networking sites such as LinkedIn, Entrepreneur Connect, and PartnerUp to name a few (Yorkie, 2012: 1).

2.2 Background to Online Recruitment

There has been a shift in the process of recruitment and selection towards online-based methods. This has changed enormously over the past 10 years and is constantly changing and evolving along with new technology and ways of integrating processes. Stone et al (2005: 22) estimated that ‘In the near future more than 95% of organisations plan to implement e-recruitment systems’. Some reports suggest that up to 90% of large organizations in the U.S. are now recruiting via the web (Anderson, 2003: 128; Cappelli, 2001: 142), and Total Jobs (2004) found that two thirds of UK organisations used job boards (independent websites who match multiple recruiters to job applicants). In order to achieve the best business results and to secure the best candidates, the methods used should be looked at and evaluated. Recruitment and selection can be considered individually. Barber (1998: 5) defines recruitment as ‘practices and activities carried out by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees’ and there is an emphasis on recruiting externally. Selection is the process of accurately measuring candidates’ knowledge, skills, abilities, personality and attitudes to select the appropriate person (Dora Scholarios, 2009: 89).

In recent times there has been more interest in how people become applicants, or the attractiveness of the employer (Searle, 2003). This affects both the employer in terms of reaching the candidates and evaluating the success of the process, and the potential employee because their decision is influenced by how the employer is viewed; sometimes referred to as the ‘applicant perspective’ (Billsberry 2007). This makes it crucial to make sure organizations select the most appropriate recruitment method.

As online recruitment is constantly changing and improving at a rapid pace, it provides another key reason behind the rationale for selecting this topic. This area of research is still new, and further research may provide fresh insight or could be used to support previous studies into this topic area.

2.3 Effectiveness and Efficiency

One of the main advantages of online recruitment is being able to reach more applicants on a global scale increasing the quality of the candidate pool. The company Cisco Systems was able to attract 500,000 people within one month with the use of online recruitment methods (Stone et al., 2005: 24). This can be seen as positive because jobs can be advertised 24 hours a day, seven days a week and in multiple forms on the web. Although this increases the chances of finding a suitable candidate, it also means that the employers have a larger task in filtering and selecting the candidate, requiring more control over, and greater efficiency in, the process (Verhoeven and Williams, 2008: 367). Online methods can also allow you to target specific applicant niches through the enormous plurality of websites and industry specific job boards on offer. However, due to their reach online methods can also deliver a high response rate of unsuitable applications (Lievens and Harris, 2003). This is especially true with the current climate with an increased rate of unemployment and fewer roles available. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2009) found that 54% of HR professionals agreed that with fewer roles to fill they have noticed an increase in the number of unsuitable applicants. This can create an increased workload for employees to sort through the candidates and need increased organisation to maintain efficiency.

With online recruitment screening processes have been implemented to improve control over the process and help to deal with the increased amount of applicants. The best candidates are found using specialized algorithms based on the criteria of the job (Russo, 2011). This saves time sifting through the applicant’s physical applications; also the Internet allows applications to be received and processed faster than any other method. However Russo (2011: 1) points out that replacing humans with software to sift applicants, even initially, has serious downsides and only becomes more valuable as it is used for more applicants. This is supported by Cappelli (2001) who argues that rigid sorting systems can yield irrelevant results wasting time and money. Also less-qualified candidates can beat the system by using key words that are selected by the sorting system. This suggests that having less human contact and by relying on online methods and the technology that supports it to control the process, can have a negative impact on the candidates selected. Considering that Cappelli’s research was conducted 10 years ago it can be assumed that screening programs and associated technology have been developed to address these problems.

A lack in human contact can also be remedied by more advanced technology. Recruitment-technology consultants Taleo and Kenexa offer software that can now track the whole application process and notify applicants automatically at ‘touch points’ for example when their application is received. This adds value to the applicant, as they feel informed, whilst increasing the efficiency of the process for the employers with minimal effort as it is automated. Each candidate’s application can be tracked individually, therefore increasing the efficiency for the employer. This is through having control over all stages of the recruitment process and being able to track it simply and easily. Also by having the opportunity to implement these features in the recruitment process it produces higher quality candidates (Russo, 2011: 1).

Specialised recruitment websites and job boards can partly take on the responsibility of including human interaction and making the process more efficient. For example ‘Beyond Credentials’ (Ellman, 2011) the online job board has a section where applicants can upload a video, with a personal pitch so you can see their personality and talent. Also [www.reed.co.uk](http://www.reed.co.uk) is an online job board website which allows you to upload your curriculum vitae (CV). As part of their service they will select the most appropriate candidates based on the job description and skills required. They will even do a preliminary interview with the potential candidates over Skype (an online based video call) before being put through to the organisation advertising the job. This makes it easier for the applicant and the employer to make sure that they are suitable for the role. This human touch point in the form of an interview increases the control over the process by increasing the levels of assessment of each candidate. This could also reduce the amount of wasted time for both parties (employer and applicant). However it can be argued that because a third party organisation, who is external to the employer is conducting this service, the employer is losing control over the process and it isn’t as efficient as there are more steps to the process. The other company (in this particular example being Reed.co.uk) may not fully understand what is expected of the candidate or liaise with relevant team members of the employer and therefore some quality applicants may be missed. However many would argue that these companies employ professionals who are good at spotting talent and so improve the process. The employers in house HR staff may not be professionals just enthusiastic amateurs and therefore not as good.

Online methods of recruitment such as specialist recruitment websites or job boards can be seen as beneficial in increasing the efficient control over the process of online recruitment. This is because organisations can easily upload their job advert and the applicants can easily upload their CV. This then results in a database that can be searched through by both employers seeking the most appropriate candidates and applicants seeking a job (Stone et al., 2005: 22; CIPD, 2007: 12). This is a way of keeping a vast amount of applicant data in one place, which can easily be found and compared. This is a good example of how online methods can help to provide efficient control over the recruitment process. However, this information is external to the organisation and may require a charge to access it, and this information won’t be exclusive to any one organisation and may result in competition over applicants. In terms of control over the recruitment process this can also be seen as adding in extra steps to the recruitment process, which may be detrimental to the time it takes to recruit the applicant. However, it also means that jobs are more accessible for candidates to apply for, which in turn requires more control over the process to make sure all of the applications get dealt with.

2.4 Securing Candidates

The main purpose of online methods of recruitment is to increase the chances of securing the best candidates through further exposure of job adverts and increased applications (Verhoeven and Williams, 2008: 365). According to a study conducted by CIPD (2007) there is an increasing interest in employing people who have the potential to grow but don’t currently have all that’s required; 71% of respondents rate it as one of the most effective ways of overcoming recruitment difficulties. Simplyhired, Jobvite, Monster and LinkedIn are all examples of online recruitment companies where you can link up a social profile to job applications. They also help making contacts and referrals of applicants/employers easier for both parties. Fortune 500 companies are embracing social network sites in hiring: 42% now have a LinkedIn or Facebook page, according to a survey by CareerXroads (2011). This additional information allows you to get a better idea of the applicant as a whole because their interests, hobbies and other details of their life are included. As this information is easily accessible it allows more specific targeting towards the types of applicants the employers are trying to recruit. Traditional methods (for example resumes/interviews/job applications) reflect a self-presentation and can be inaccurate due to reflecting their maximal performance instead of their typical performance. Also they are based on the individual’s opinions whereas social networks are more likely to be based on their typical behaviours and therefore a more valid method of recruitment and selection (Sackett, 2007; Sackett et al., 1988). Also e-recruitment can allow for deeper assessment through things such as competency based questions and online exams where applicants can expand on experiences and be tested. This allows organisations to have the opportunity to filter candidates to find the brightest applicants. Also there is often the opportunity to have a questionnaire which identifies the applicants personality type to see if they will fit in with the employer and the vacancy. If they don’t fit with the employer’s values the candidate can quickly be told; saving the employer and the applicant time and effort. However social networks information can be broad and varied making it hard to compare applicants, also discrimination becomes a factor due to the extent of information that can be found out. Online competency tests provide the opportunity for applicants to cheat because they are completed at home unsupervised, however this should not be an issue as most companies re-test applicants under supervision before selection of an employee is concluded (Target Jobs, 2012).

2.5 Discrimination

Using social networks and screening processes within the recruitment and selection process raises massive ethical and legal issues (Zeidner, 2007), for example issues of privacy laws, data protection act, discrimination, and the monitoring of applicants. Employers have the opportunity to use information which is available but is not relevant to the job but is used to assess a candidate e.g. age and marital status. This is not allowed to be brought up in methods such as interviews but can easily be found out using the social media sites (Kowske and Southwell, 2006) and organizations can be sued for discrimination if these candidates are not hired due to that information being used (Fuller, 2006).

Methods of recruitment such as personal contacts and being recommended for the job can be valuable but this can be achieved efficiently through online methods as well, for example through LinkedIn and suggesting connections or recommending people for jobs. Research suggests that people have a natural talent for judging one another accurately (Vazire and Gosling, 2004) supporting the view that efficiency can be increased using online methods. The validity and reliability of the information provided on social networks should still be used with caution when making hiring decisions because not all of the information is necessarily correct.

It is easy to assume that recruiting online through various different methods would allow more equal opportunities for applicants and enables the employer to gain a diverse workforce. However Stone et al (2005) found that women use computers less than men, and applicants from lower socioeconomic groups tend to have less access to the Internet and computers. This is a disadvantage and discriminates against the groups who are excluded from the reach of the job vacancy. The employers could also suffer by not attracting the right people for the job (Wuttke, 2008). This will have changed over the past 6 years with more houses having Internet access and most job centres now have computers with online access, and staff providing help. Also for certain industries such as the technology industry, this may be a necessary requirement for people to regularly use the Internet and to be computer literate. There is nothing to suggest that other methods of recruitment will not also face the same problem of reaching a diverse audience. Also research shows that 60% of employers have a diversity strategy in place hoping to provide equal opportunities and attract a diverse workforce (CIPD, 2009). Many employers now advertise over different media types in order to not exclude different social and ethical groups, a hybrid of e-recruitment and traditional methods (Wuttke, 2008).

2.6 Gaps in the literature

From looking at previous studies there are some gaps in the research that can be identified. There has been a very limited amount of research that has been conducted on the topic of online methods of recruitment (Verhoeven and Williams, 2008: 364). This is supported by Young and Weinroth (2003: 11) referring to it as ‘currently minimal field of internet recruitment literature’, and Lievens et al. (2002: 586) describing it as ‘very scarce’. Also the research that has been conducted has mainly been based within the United States of America (USA) rather than the UK or Europe. This may be due to the topic of online recruitment being fairly new and as it is changing at a rapid pace the information quickly becomes out of date (Bartram, 2000). This highlights a need for further research to be conducted to keep up to date, but also to consider the views of employers within the United Kingdom.

Another gap in the literature is that most of research that has been conducted on the reasons for adopting online recruitment has been aimed towards the positives and negatives of its uses and not the reasons behind the choices of selecting them. The literature produces some contradictory findings, some things are seen as an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. A summary of the advantages and disadvantages of online-based recruitment and selection methods can be seen in Table 1. This table also supports the literature presented based on the effectiveness of online methods and candidate targeting:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| Geographical spread (CIPD 2005; McDougall 2001; Mohamed et al. 2002) | Higher expectations regarding relocation costs (Brooke 1998) |
| Larger audience (Alfus 2001; Bartram 2006; Burke 1998, JWT Research 1998; Laabs 1998; Pin et al. 2001; Zusman and Landis 2002) | Development fees for small companies (Verhoeven and Williams 2008) |
| Greater chance to find the right candidate quicker/greater effectiveness (Galanaki 2002) | Name recognition required (buying banner space etc.) (Baillie 1996; Galanaki 2002) |
| 24/7, no waiting for issue dates (CIPD 2005; Pin et al. 2001) | Outdated resumes (Sullivan 1998: cited by Hays 1998) |
| Quicker turn-around time/cost saving (Galanaki 2002; Pin et al. 2001; Zusman and Landis 2002) | Discrimination/privacy (Bartram 2000; Dash 1999; Feldman and Klass 2002; Pin et al. 2001; Pitturo 2000; Smith 1999) |
| Relatively cheap (Baillie 1996; Burke 1998; Fister 1999, Galanaki 2002; Kuhn 2003; Mohamed et al. 2002; Schreyer and McCarter 1998; Van den Broek et al. 1999) | Internet not the first option for applicants (Feldman and Klass 2002; Galanki 2002) |
| Higher quality of applicants (Bartram 2000) | Overwhelming number of candidates (Brooke 1998; Galanaki 2002; Haley 2000; Lawrence 1999 cited by Bartram 2000) |
| Better match workers/vacancies (Freeman 2002) | Number of unqualified candidates (Kaydo and Cohen 1999; Greenberg 1998; IRS Employment Review 2005) |
| Shift from manual screening to using ‘HRM expertise’ (Bingham et al. 2002; Pin et al. 2001) | Time consuming sifting of application forms (Mitchel 1998) |
| Positive effect on corporate image/up-to-date image (Galanaki 2002; Pin et al. 2001) | Poor segmentation of the market (Pin et al. 2001) |
| Efficiency gains (Verhoeven and Williams 2008) | Transparency of data (Pin et al.2001) |
| Cost saving/saving personnel costs (Pin et al. 2001) |  |
| Inform in more creative ways (Frost 1997, Cober et al. 2000) |  |
| Access passive jobseekers (Galanaki 2002) |  |
| Target candidates/address niche markets (Galanaki 2002; Pin et al. 2001) |  |
| Reduction of unqualified candidates (Pin et al. 2001) |  |
| More opportunities for smaller companies (Pin et al. 2001) |  |

*(Table 1.)*

There has been little, if any, research using efficiency and control over the process as a main theme. This is particularly interesting as many surveys highlight that online methods of recruitment are adopted because of: relative cost; the increase in the number of applicants, the speed to hire, more unsuitable applicants and wanting to be able to screen the applicants more efficiently (see Table 2.). The independent online job boards such as Monster have done primary research in to the amount of change in online recruitment but again not the reasons behind it. Their findings support that online recruitment is increasing, being +6% over last year (Monster, 2011), the only reason provided for this is an increased demand for a skilled workforce; having a 29% year on year growth (Monster, 2011). However there has been no research on how the methods allow organisations to increase their efficiency and control specifically and in particular in targeting the best candidates.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| **Factors influencing the adoption of online recruitment** | **Tally of Responses** |  | |
| Relative Cost | 11 |  |
| Speed To Hire | 9 |  |
| Reach: Pool Size | 6 |  |
| Swamped With Applications | 6 |  |
| Unsuitable Candidates | 5 |  |
| International | 4 |  |
| Diversity | 4 |  |
| Provision of Information | 4 |  |
| Company Image | 4 |  |
| Ease of Screening | 3 |  |
| Targeting | 2 |  |
| Computer Literacy | 2 |  |
| Implementation | 2 |  |
| 24/7 Availability | 1 |  |
| Passive Jobseekers | 1 |  |
| Online Screening | 1 |  |
| Convenience | 1 |  |
| New Technology | 1 |  |
| Candidate Targeting | 0 |  |

*(Adapted from Parry and Wilson, 2009: 660, Table.2)*

It has been shown that online recruitment is constantly changing and improving at a rapid pace, Stone et al (2005: 22) estimated that ‘In the near future more than 95% of organisations plan to implement e-recruitment systems’. Research has shown the advantages of online recruitment and selection seem to justify using online methods. By using online methods of recruitment the hiring cycle time can be reduced by 25% (Stone et al., 2005: 24), more applicants can be reached on a global scale (CIPD, 2005), it saves time (Galanki, 2002) and human resources (Pin et al., 2001), it is easier to target labour niches (Galanki, 2002: Pin et al. 2001), more information on the applicant can be found and an employer can enhance their image through their recruitment process (Kowske and Southwell, 2006). The findings presented from the literature review will form the base of the conceptual framework.