

Exploring recruitment and selection trends in the Eastern Cape

Author:

Gerrit J. Louw¹

Affiliation:

¹Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Correspondence to:

Gerrit Louw

Email:

gerrit.louw@nmmu.ac.za

Postal address:

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Orientation: The recruitment, selection and development of suitable candidates are crucial strategic functions to ensure the competitiveness of corporate and public sector organisations.

Research purpose: The purpose of the study was to determine whether targeted organisations have a clear recruitment and selection policy by means of a preliminary exploratory study. In addition to this, the objective was the need to establish the various techniques or methods in use to recruit and select candidates for vacant posts.

Motivation for the study: To develop a better understanding of the trends in the application of recruitment and selection methods within the Eastern Cape.

Research design, approach and method: This study has a non-experimental design. Methodological processes followed a qualitative and quantitative mixed approach. Structured interviews were used to collect data followed by a descriptive statistical analysis, summary and interpretation of results.

Main findings: Whereas newspaper advertising and recruitment agencies are the most popular recruitment methods, the application blank and interviews were mostly preferred for selection purposes. Although assessment centres and psychological assessments were also regarded as popular selection methods, assessment centres were; however, the most prominent selection method to follow of the above two mentioned selection methods.

Practical/managerial implications: The research findings could provide corporate leaders and their human resource functionaries with a theoretical pointer relative to recruitment and selection trends within the Province which could guide more effective skills attraction and selection decisions.

Contribution/value-add: The study provided valuable strategic information to improve on organisational competitiveness via effective recruitment and selection processes. In addition, training and educational programmes could eventually fill the needs and gaps identified in organisational functioning and professional service delivery.

Introduction

Problem statement

Key focus of the study

How would companies in a poverty stricken region procure quality and effective workers in an oversupply of unskilled workers? The aforementioned question is not only relevant to developing countries but it also became an international dilemma as overseas companies are uncertain as to what talent attraction and retention decisions they should make (Crous, 2007; Madia, 2011). At the same time the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998) has disrupted the freedom of choice in the employee selection process by accelerating a law-driven need to appoint certain ethnic groups at the expense of other groups (Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011).

A growing body of research evidence supports a tendency of European and American companies to increasingly use more technological advanced media to attract and select suitable applicants of quality (Anderson, Salgado & Hülsheger, 2010; Branine, 2008; Madia, 2011; Tippins, 2009; Zibarras & Woods, 2010). In addition, companies tend to strengthen their brand as a means of attracting applicants (Madia, 2011; Parry & Wilson, 2009). The key focus of this research was to explore the use of recruitment and selection methods in the Eastern Cape.

Background of the study

The effectiveness of an organisation depends on the effectiveness of its employees. Without a highly skilled and qualified labour force, an organisation is destined to achieve mediocre performance. For this reason the recruitment and selection of human capital is a critical human resource

function (Grobler, Wörnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2006). Human resource management, the overarching function of recruitment and selection, does not function in isolation as it did in the past but currently operates in conjunction with the management and decision processes within the economy (Van Rensburg, Basson & Carrim, 2011). As a result of human resource management's crucial role in an organisation, the procurement of a suitable labour force has become part of an organisation's business strategy (Grobler *et al.*, 2006). This function involves a variety of human resource activities, including the analysis of the labour market, long-term planning, procurement, interviewing and testing. The recruitment and selection process is; however, not without problems. Retaining quality workers is challenging as a result of recent phenomena such as skills shortages, employee mobility and the expected retirement of baby boomers in the near future (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2011). These phenomena negatively affect organisations' ability to create and maintain their competitive advantage in the labour market. This situation will worsen if organisations do not handle the aforementioned dilemmas properly (Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2011).

The constraints relevant to retention are further worsened by an undersupply of skilled or suitable candidates to fill the existing vacancies (Nzokuma & Bussin, 2011). According to survey results released by Statistics South Africa (STATS SA, 2012), the unemployment rate in South Africa stayed relatively unchanged between the first quarter of 2011 (25.0%) and the corresponding quarter of 2012 (25.2%). During the same period the Eastern Cape experienced a higher unemployment rate that increased from 26.9% to 28.0%. This means that in some Provinces the unemployment rate is lower whilst it is higher in the said Province (STATS SA, 2012). The Eastern Cape, together with the Provinces of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga are the poorest Provinces in terms of socio-economic resources, education and monetary income (Worku, 2011). Like in other parts of the country the pool of suitable workers in this Province, especially the talent of Black people, is limited by equity legislation and the emigration of skilled workers (Nzokuma & Bussin, 2011).

Various recruitment and selection techniques and methods are at the disposal of the recruitment officer. Harris, Brewster and Sparrow (2002) are convinced that the decision to use recruitment and selection methods differ from country to country and region to region. Such decisions are dictated by labour legislation and the source of recruitment that may be available from within or outside the organisation. Schreuder and Coetzee (2010) postulate an increase in the use of technology *inter alia* in the recruitment and selection process. Ployhart (2006) agrees and suggests a more modern approach to recruitment and selection to deal with challenges faced by recruitment and selection functionaries. However, such an inclination is unknown in the Eastern Cape because of its disadvantaged economic position. Such circumstances limit the implementation of sophisticated recruitment and

selection techniques because of high costs. Furthermore, the last survey on this topic was published in 2002 (Van der Merwe, 2002) with the focus being on the employment of psychometrics in the selection process.

Research on the recruitment and selection trends in the Eastern Cape is; therefore, long overdue. Research on this topic is further supported by the view that large differences exist between academic findings and the beliefs of managers in how the staffing process should be run (Rynes, Colbert & Brown, 2002). To find a synchronized view between academia and the applied field of recruitment and selection in the Eastern Cape, preliminary research is warranted. A further need would be to establish recruitment and selection trends in this Province that is experiencing a lack of capital to employ sophisticated methods and techniques. Such information would boost the competitive advantage of companies in the region when using it to employ quality employees.

Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of generating a pool of capable candidates applying to an organisation for employment (Gold, 2007). Applicants with experience and qualifications most closely related to job specifications may eventually be selected. Organisations become concerned when the cost of a mistake in recruitment is high. According to Armstrong (2006) the aim is to obtain, at a minimum cost, the number of suitable and qualified candidates to satisfy the needs of the organisation. The organisation attracts candidates by means of identifying, evaluating and using the most appropriate sources of applicants. El-Kot and Leat's (2008) observation is that recruitment begins with advertising existing vacancies.

As already mentioned, this can be done internally or externally. In this instance the researcher was interested in external sources and processes as organisations in the Province are currently experiencing an undersupply of suitable candidates. Company policies related to the employment of relatives may influence its recruitment efforts. Currently more and more companies implement anti-nepotism policies that prevent the employment of close relatives, especially relevant to placement of candidates in the same departments or work groups (Hayajenh, Maghrabi & Al-Dabbagh, 1994; McMillan, 2006).

For most organisations, direct applications by mail or by individuals applying in person, form the largest source of applicants. The usefulness of direct applications will often depend on the image the organisation has in the business community and the eventual quality of such applicants (Beardwell, 2007). Other sources of recruitment include personal contacts, walk-ins, university and school campus recruiting, career fairs, recruitment agencies, newspaper advertising and direct mail postings to suitable candidates (Beardwell, 2007; Cober & Brown, 2006; Grobler *et al.*, 2006; Madi, 2011; Tucker, 2012; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Several authors (Beardwell, 2007; Galanaki, 2002; Stone, Stone-Romero & Lukaszewski, 2006) refer to the aforementioned

recruitment sources as traditional sources whilst radio, television and Internet recruitment (e-recruitment) and job boards are regarded as recent sources. The latter includes technologically advanced methods such as Twitter and cell phones (Madia, 2011; Tucker, 2012). E-recruitment includes job postings on company homepages as well as *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) uploads to central databases. Other researchers (Pollit, 2005; Tong & Sivanand, 2005) are of the opinion that the use of e-recruitment in the recruitment process is increasing because of its cost-effectiveness. However, recent authors (Madia, 2011; Tucker, 2012) are of the opinion that e-recruitment (job boards included) will soon be surpassed by Twitter and cell phone recruitment.

In addition, McManus and Ferguson (2003) found that global organisations are increasingly utilizing their organisations' websites for online recruitment. In 1998, these researchers found that 29% of the companies surveyed are making use of online recruitment, but in 2002, it increased to 91%. Stone *et al.*'s (2006) explanation for the increase in online recruitment is that it reduces costs and that the time spent on the hiring process is also reduced. Furthermore, the range of applicants can also be expanded. Wuttke (2009) warns that online recruitment also has disadvantages. One of them is that prospective employees who do not have access to the Internet or who are not using it for job searches due to a low socio-economic status, are consequently overlooked in the recruitment process. Stone *et al.* (2006) are; however, of the opinion that online recruitment attracts applicants who have high expectations, who are achievement-orientated and self-driven. According to these authors such advantages overshadow the disadvantages of online recruitment.

Whereas the previous section explains the process of recruitment and concepts involved, the following section investigates selection as a process within the procurement domain.

Selection

Mondy (2010, p. 136) refers to selection as 'the process of choosing from a group of applicants those individuals best suited for a particular position in an organization.' Whereas the recruitment process is aligned to encourage individuals to seek employment with the organisation, the selection process is to identify and employ the best qualified and suitable individuals for specific positions. The position in the United Kingdom was that, traditionally, it was assumed that organisations could choose amongst applicants and that almost all job offers would be accepted by applicants. However, attracting a large number of applicants was not the problem, but recruiting the right applicants became the main concern amongst employers (Branine, 2008). With the oversupply of unskilled applicants in South Africa (Nzokuma & Bussin, 2011), it can be assumed that employers would be very careful before selecting any applicants.

Traditionally the Person-Environment Fit construct was central when setting criteria in the selection process.

According to Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson (2011) this approach generally focuses on two dimensions. The one is the extent to which a job provides rewards that meet the individual's needs. The second type of fit deals with the extent to which the applicant's skills, abilities, and experience meet the requirements of the employer. If a misfit exists between either one of these types, an individual may develop stress during his or her stay with the employer. During recent years support for a multilevel fit for selection purposes emerged that requires a variety of selection sources or techniques to appoint the desired applicant (Anderson, Lievens, Van Dam & Ryan, 2004; Kristof-Brown, Jansen & Colbert, 2002). Such approaches are the Person-Job Fit, Person-Team Fit and the Person-Organisation Fit. According to the aforementioned authors, different techniques, methods or tools are needed to evaluate each of these fit types. Cognitive ability tests, unstructured interviews and value inventories could be techniques to assess the respective fit types (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002).

Schmidt and Hunter (1998) list several 'traditional' sources through which applicants could be selected. The list contains open or structured application forms, tests of knowledge and skill, tests of ability and personality, interviews and assessment centre exercises. It seems that the applicant selection procedures of candidates vary from employer to employer (Branine, 2008). It has been a common practice for many organisations to select candidates through face-to-face interviews and tests. According to Lievens, Dam and Anderson (2002) an increasing number of organisations are using now other methods such as telephone interviews, assessment centres and online testing. A survey conducted by Bevan and Fryatt (1988) revealed that selection tests were basically optional in the United Kingdom whilst the use of application forms, references and interviews was very popular. In 1994 Schackleton and Newell (1994) observed amongst European countries that the use of tests was on the increase whilst the use of application forms, reference checks and interviews were the most popular. In addition to these techniques it was also found that many companies used a pre-selection process.

British companies regard school and university results as too inflated and this factor serves as a motivation to revert to a psychological assessment. Jenkins and Wolf's (2002) observations support the findings of Bevan and Fryatt (1988) particularly with reference to the increasing use of tests. An explanation for this is that the results of recent qualifications tend to be inflated and companies seek more reliable and valid means to appoint the correct applicant. In addition, more and more qualifications are manipulated and it increases the difficulty of the selection process (Cook & Cripps, 2005; Wolf & Jenkins, 2006). Consequently, major companies could not deal with selection flaws that hamper performance and productivity, and; therefore, they have reinstated psychological assessments as part of the selection process. Such reversed processes have been reported in the United Kingdom (Wolf & Jenkins, 2006) as well as in the

United States of America (DeCenzo & Robbins, 2007). No empirical research could be found on what the situation in South Africa is. The last research paper published in this regard does not reflect on any changing tendencies relevant to the use of psychometric instruments for selection purposes (Van der Merwe, 2002).

As a result of the increased availability of technology, more organisations use computerised testing and multimedia tests in the selection process. In addition, companies are increasingly viewing video conferencing as important and more useful as face-to-face interviewing (Branine, 2008; Straus, Miles & Levesque, 2001). Although face-to-face interviews are sometimes regarded as subjective and unreliable, Anderson and Witvliet (2008) found that these interviews are the most frequently used selection technique. Sackett and Lievens (2008) reported in their study that the application blank, interviews, and reference checking are the most popular techniques used in the selection process when incorporated into assessment centres. According to Branine (2008), United Kingdom employers became more interested in the personal aspects of applicants such as attitudes towards work, personality and transferrable skills whilst an increased use of multiple selection methods were observed in order to be flexible to labour demands. The consequence is that lower premiums were placed on the type or level of qualifications.

It is clear from the literature review that the process of recruitment and selection abroad involves the use of a variety of recruitment and selection methods. Such methods were developed and changed in type and level of use over time. Furthermore, as highlighted by Nzukuma and Bussin (2011), the South African labour market is experiencing its own unique challenges that reflect employee movement from organisation to organisation that makes retention difficult. Another problem highlighted by the aforementioned literature review is the oversupply of unskilled workers that the South African labour market is currently experiencing which poses new challenges to recruitment and selection officials.

Whilst the literature review reflects a shift in theory and practice abroad, as well as in South Africa in general, this study attempted to investigate the shift or development, if any, in the type of recruitment and selection methods currently in use in the Eastern Cape. The rationale for the study is that organisations and training institutions continuously need research data on strategic human resource information to maintain competitiveness by keeping pace with modern developments (Grobler *et al.*, 2006). The contribution of such information would be twofold. Firstly, in order to stay competitive, organisations can adjust their practices by providing specialised training on new focus areas. Secondly, universities in the region can adjust their curricula to empower future practitioners in the relevant field of practice.

Since a shift in recruitment and selection practices is observed in literature reports, the following two research questions were formulated:

- Do companies in the Eastern Cape have predetermined recruitment and selection policies?
- What are the recruitment and selection trends in the Eastern Cape?

Objectives of the research

As noted earlier, organisations in South Africa in general are experiencing an unexpected labour turnover whilst dealing with an undersupply of skilled and suitable candidates. In particular, due to its economically disadvantaged position, the Eastern Cape is assumed to experience more difficulties in fulfilling the procurement task with limited recruitment and selection resources. The objective of the study was to determine whether targeted organisations had a clear recruitment and selection policy by means of a preliminary exploratory study. In addition to this objective, was the need to establish the various techniques or methods in use to recruit and select candidates for vacant posts.

Literature review

According to researchers (Ballantine, 2009; Scolarios, Lockyer & Johnson, 2003), the recruitment and selection process begins by reviewing the need for labour and conducting a job analysis to develop clear job and person specifications. Literature on this topic emphasises the importance of conducting a thorough needs analysis. This is to accurately forecast the labour demand and availability in order to establish any surplus or shortage (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2008). Recruitment and selection efforts could be focussed on by either the internal or external environment depending on what the organisation's need for new employees would be. In cases where organisations have no suitable candidates currently employed who could be promoted or transferred, or where a demand for a specific skill arises, such organisations will necessarily have to make extraordinary efforts to recruit suitable candidates from outside these organisations (Mondy, 2010). Although the selection process usually follows after recruitment, these two processes have their own definitions; therefore, recruitment and selection are discussed in separate sections commencing with recruitment.

Method

Research approach

The study is of a non-experimental, exploratory nature with mixed qualitative and quantitative research methodological processes. A qualitative structured interview was used to collect data followed by a descriptive, quantitative data analysis. The researcher followed an exploratory approach because no previous research was conducted in the same geographic area with the same focus. Furthermore, accessibility is limited as not all organisations in the region have company websites on which contact particulars are published for research purposes. Babbie (2009) suggests that exploratory research must be used when the topic or issue is new and when data are difficult to collect. In addition, Armstrong (2006) supports a preliminary exploratory

approach when it is uncertain which factors are influencing the choice of recruitment and selection processes in a human resource management context.

A purposive sample was drawn of organisations identified from where the researcher could obtain research information on the recruitment and selection trends within the geographic area targeted for the research. As in this study, where no prior research was conducted in the region on a similar subject, Merriam (1998) recommends a purposive sampling strategy through which participants are chosen from which the most benefit could be gained.

The research strategy

The research strategy the researcher used in this study was to explore the sample of accessible employers' implementation of recruitment and selection policies and methods in their respective organisations through a researcher-administered structured interview. Nineteen recruitment and selection officials were interviewed to gain more insight to what extent the organisations implement recruitment and selection procedures and methods.

Research method

The following section deals with the research method.

Research setting

The research was conducted in various settings as the organisations differed from each other. Furthermore, the interviewees work in diverse organisations ranging from corporate to government organisations. Each participant was approached in his or her respective normal work setting.

Entrée and establishing researcher role

Post graduate students in Human Resource Management were assigned to establish voluntary participation and contact persons in targeted organisations. A contact list was composed by students with contact information of recruitment and selection officials at various organisations in the geographical research area. The list originated from officials who attend regular human resource management forum meetings, which is a subject-relevant interest group composed of corporate and public sector human resource management officials, lecturing staff and post graduate students. In a follow-up phase the researcher arranged individual interview sessions with contact persons who consequently acted as interviewees.

Research participants

Research-accessible organisations within the geographic region of the Eastern Cape were demarcated for sampling purposes, as mentioned earlier. Organisations with at least 50 or more employees on the payroll whilst having staff members designated specifically, or in general, to the recruitment and selection function, qualified for inclusion in the study. One official with first hand recruitment and

selection information and experience at each organisation acted as representative during the interview process. Before each interview commenced, the researcher recorded what industry each organisation represents. Various types of organisations were included in the study, namely: retail, automotive, automotive allied, pharmaceutical, banking, food and household, brewery, telecommunication, Government, fitness and clothing industries. Table 1 provides insight into the different sectors represented in the sample. This table shows that a large variety of sectors took part in the research whilst the automotive allied, automotive manufacturing, banking and financing as well as government organisations were in the majority of those included in the sample.

Research instrument

To compose a structured interview questionnaire, the researcher followed Welman, Kruger and Mitchell's (2005) recommendation by using relevant literature sources to formulate research questions. The literature review provided useful information when the questionnaire was structured into different sections. The first section (Section A) categorised organisations in terms of the number of employees in service (e.g., 50 to 100, 101 to 200, 201 to 300 – see Table 2). The second section (Section B) contained tick-box questions in a dichotomous format ('yes' or 'no'). Weller and Romney (1988) recommend a dichotomous format when the correct answer is unknown ahead of time, and when an extension on the question is not required. The dichotomous format was well suited to this research due to its exploratory nature. Section B of the questionnaire included questions that tapped into whether an organisation had a clear recruitment and selection policy, whether it made use of newspaper advertising, an application blank and other methods in the recruitment and selection process. Methods listed were either ticked 'yes' or 'no' depending on which option was applicable. The third section (Section C) provided recording space to add methods not listed or for comments in cases where the interviewees attempted to clarify some uncertainties relevant to answers given in Section B, for example, when an interviewee indicated that presentations or in-basket exercises were used outside the assessment centre context.

TABLE 1: Types of organisations.

Type of organisation	Number
Automotive allied	3
Automotive manufacturing	2
Household and personal products	1
Pharmaceutical	1
Food industry	1
Motor vehicle	1
Liquor	1
Clothing manufacturing	1
Banking and financing	3
Government	2
Telecommunication	1
Health and fitness	1
Newspaper	1
Total	19

Research procedure

Before the interviews commenced, the researcher confirmed the organisation's voluntary participation through the company representative (the interviewee). The researcher also assured the interviewees that company information would be treated as confidential. Each respective interviewee was asked to provide the number of employees in service in his or her company, which was recorded by the researcher. Questions in Section B that covered the recruitment and selection methods in use were 'ticked' depending on the answer provided.

Data analysis

Information obtained from organisations relevant to Section A were summarised in one table. Information from Section B was quantified and summarised in a cumulative descriptive table. Raw data were converted into frequencies and percentages whilst tabulated in a descriptive format for analytical purposes. The frequency distributions indicated a clear preference for certain recruitment and selection methods. Further statistical analyses were not possible due to the nature of the data.

Results

The main objective of this research study was to explore the recruitment and selection trends in the Eastern Cape. Consequently, the aim of the study was to determine, by means of a preliminary exploratory study, whether targeted organisations have a clear recruitment and selection policy and which of the various recruitment and selection methods, or techniques, were still popular. Insight into such information would indicate whether a shift to more cost-effective methods has taken place in the region.

Table 2 displays the respective organisations' sizes that participated in this study in terms of the number of employees in service. According to the frequency distributions, eight out of the 19 organisations (42.11%) have 1000 or more employees in service. This category is evenly followed by those organisations who indicated that they have between 301 and 500 employees and the cluster has between 501 to 1000 employees in service. The aforementioned clusters represent 84.00% of the organisations interviewed. Organisations that have between 201 and 300 employees (5.20%) represent the smallest portion of the sample followed by those organisations that have between 101 and 200 employees (10.53%).

Table 2 reflects a variety of organisational sizes that were included in the study. Empirical results will be discussed in the following sections, commencing with recruitment.

Ethical considerations

Recruitment

Table 3 displays the various recruitment and selection methods used by the participating organisations. All organisations indicated that they have a clear recruitment and

selection policy that forms the foundation of such relevant activities. Although it is not known what specific procedures are followed in each respective procedure, researchers (Greenidge, Alleyne, Parris & Grant 2012; Klein, McComber, Schiemann & Wright, 2005) are of the opinion that such formal procedure includes at least an assessment of whether the vacancy should be filled, a job analysis, a job description and personal specifications. In a South African context, the aforementioned is not surprising. Nzukuma and Bussin (2011) are of the opinion that a clear policy with specific procedures may make an organisation less susceptible to legal blunders made in the selection process, especially in the South African context where the government's transformation agenda is monitored by equity legislation.

The frequency distributions in Table 3 depicts that none of the participating organisations use walk-ins and referrals as recruitment methods as they are mindful of potential accusations of nepotism. Singanto (2003) agrees that in the South African context the use of external recruitment sources is one way of avoiding nepotism in the recruitment and selection process. It could further be argued that walk-ins and referrals may probably deliberately be avoided due to the Employment Equity Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998) that obligates South African organisations to create equal opportunities for employment, especially in the case of larger organisations that are bound by law in terms of sporadic equity audits. When studying several research outputs (i.e. Breaugh, 1981; Saks, 1994; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), Greenidge, Alleyne, Parris and Grant (2012) came to

TABLE 2: Number of employees in organisations.

Categories	Frequency	%
50–100 employees	0	00.00
101–200 employees	2	10.53
201–300 employees	1	05.26
301–500 employees	4	21.05
501–1000 employees	4	21.05
1000+ employees	8	42.11
Total	19	100.00

TABLE 3: Recruitment and selection methods in use.

Recruitment and selection methods	Human resource function	Frequency	%
Recruitment	Having a clear procedure	19	100.00
	Walk-ins	0	00.00
	Referrals	0	00.00
	Graduate recruitment	1	05.26
	Newspaper advertising	17	89.47
	Internet recruitment	5	26.32
	Headhunting	2	10.53
	Recruitment agencies	16	84.21
Selection	Application blank	19	100.00
	Interview	18	94.73
	Reference checking	16	84.21
	Psychometric assessments	12	63.16
	Presentation	4	21.05
	In-basket	2	10.53
	Assessment centres	14	73.68

n = 19

the conclusion that referrals and applicant-initiated contacts usually result in high quality workers who are committed to organisations. In the same vein, El-Kot and Leat (2008) observed that the word-of-mouth recruitment method such as employee referrals is more effective in the case of administrative work rather than management or professional positions. Grobler *et al.* (2006) add to the debate by saying that referred employees are more committed to and satisfied with their organisations in comparison with other recruitment methods. When considering the avoidance of walk-ins and referrals as indicated in this research, a question that could be asked is whether South African labour legislation would not possibly improve job creation via informal recruitment methods such as employee referrals and walk-ins.

A further inspection of Table 3 reveals that newspaper advertising and recruitment agencies are the most popular of all methods in use by the sampled organisations. Seventeen out of 19 (89.47%) indicated that they use newspaper advertising followed by 16 organisations (84.21%) who are using recruitment agencies to fill vacant posts. The result of newspaper advertising is analogous with results published by other researchers (El-Kot & Leat, 2008; Wickramasinghe, 2007). The results published by the latter researchers were obtained from countries outside the United States and Europe where Internet usage is more popular.

The low frequency of Internet use reflected in this research; therefore, does not support the results of research conducted in Europe or the United States of America. According to authors (Grodeck, 2010; Madia, 2011; Streiter, 2011) it seems that Internet recruitment has grown over the past decade across the world and is now widely used by both recruiters and job seekers. In the American context, Cober and Brown (2006) found that more than half of new candidates were recruited via the Internet. Job boards, which are job postings to an Internet recruitment company, were the most popular recruitment source. This trend is expected to increase. In another study Crispin and Mehler (2006) revealed that just over 20% of external appointees were from corporate web sites whilst referrals are still most popular. In the same study it was noticed that job boards are the third most popular recruitment source surveyed by the researchers. With reference to the United Kingdom, Parry and Wilson (2009) asserts that there is still a large proportion of organisations that has not yet used Internet recruitment, whilst those who do use online recruitment often do so in addition with other techniques, such as print advertising and recruitment agencies. The use of the said methods is analogous with the researcher's findings; however, recruitment agencies which are highly popular in this research do not share the same sentiments reported by Wickramasinghe (2007) where it was ranked the least popular method. In a study conducted by El-Kot and Leat (2008), it was found that only 29 out of 52 of the respondents used recruitment agencies as a source.

As mentioned before, the Internet's popularity is growing abroad whilst a limited number of organisations in this

research study use the Internet. A valid explanation would be that a large portion of the population in the Eastern Cape does not have access to the electronic media. The local job seekers see recruitment agencies as a point where CV's could be manually submitted whilst employers have free access to such job seekers via agencies.

This research detected that a very small portion of the organisations use headhunting as a method. Recruitment companies are responsible for headhunting quality employees on behalf of companies; therefore it is difficult to establish the popularity of this technique amongst organisations. It is assumed this method is categorised under 'recruitment agencies' as the latter are usually assigned to do headhunting on behalf of organisations whilst it is not a function allocated to recruitment and selection specialists within companies.

As indicated in Table 3, graduate recruitment is a method that is not much in use in the Eastern Cape. It seems that it is only large organisations that require employees with specific academic qualifications who use graduate recruitment as a source. Branine's (2008) experience is that graduate recruitment became a problem in the United Kingdom and Europe as a result of the increased use of the Internet. Furthermore, difficulties with this recruitment method are aggravated by the fact that graduates increasingly apply for jobs that were previously occupied by school leavers. The increasing competition forces candidates to respond faster to available jobs on the Internet which make it difficult to find the right people. This section concluded with a discussion on recruitment, the next section deals with selection.

Discussion

Selection

Table 3 reveals that the application blank (100.00%) and the interview (94.73%) are the most popular selection methods followed by reference checking (84.21%). It is further noticed that a large portion of organisations (73.68%) made use of assessment centres. Psychometric assessments are the fourth most popular (63.16%) method used in this research. A small percentage used presentations (21.05%) followed by in-basket tests (10.53%).

It should be mentioned that whereas presentations and in-basket tests were usually used as part of the services rendered by assessment centres (Eurich & Krause, 2009; Ployhart, 2006), interviewees in this research study indicated that presentations and in-basket tests are used as part of the selection process, in addition to other selection methods (e.g. application blank, interviews, etc.), excluding psychological assessments and assessment centres. In such cases, the organisation relied predominantly on the application blank, interviews, reference checks with either in-basket tests or presentations included in the process. Some literature is analogous with this trend (Fleenor & Kurtz, 1987) and this is usually the case when selecting sales representatives. Fleenor and Kurtz (1987) assert that a single exercise fitted into the

selection process could provide some valuable information on a significant number of skills required in organisations. Although this research is not a comparative study, further similarities and dissimilarities found in this research and other literature reports are discussed in the following section.

Whereas the application blank is the most popular method in this research, a comparative study conducted by Anderson and Witvliet (2008) in six countries ranked the interview as the most popular selection method in their sample. Another study conducted by Sackett and Lievens (2008) seems to be analogous with this research in which the application form, the interview and reference checking, in combination with assessment centres, are rated as the most popular selection methods. The application blank and the interview were also regarded as most popular in the Eastern Cape in an earlier study conducted by Van der Merwe (2002). The popularity in this research formed by the triad consisting of the application blank, the interview and assessment centres is supported by Wickramasinghe's (2007) findings produced in Sri Lanka. According to Branine (2008) the popularity of assessment centres lies in the advantage that the employer has to observe the candidates in terms of behaviour in various situations such as leadership, influencing and persuasion abilities, competitiveness and motivation. Branine is also of the opinion that assessment centres are especially popular amongst large organisations. Researchers (Tixier, 1996; Zibarras & Woods, 2010) are in agreement that larger organisations are using assessment centres and psychological assessments more than smaller ones as a result of cost. Large organisations have more vacancies and more money available to make use of a wide range of selection methods to sift through applicants. Zibarras and Woods (2010) regard organisations with 250 or less as small organisations. In this study it was noticed that almost 84% of the organisations have more than 250 employees whilst the same percentage indicated that they made use of assessment centres; therefore, it can be argued that with regard to the findings on assessment centres, this research produced similar results to that published in the Zibarras and Woods (2010) study.

Results of this research suggest that approximately two thirds of the respondents used psychometric instruments. Although this research did not focus on what attributes were mostly assessed in the Eastern Cape, in general it seems that the use of objective assessment tools and assessment centres were regarded as useful in the selection process. Authors (Burke, 2009; Tippins, 2009) say that most organisations use psychometric instruments for the assessment of cognitive abilities, personality and integrity testing, but the soundness of online testing is still under suspicion in terms of the prevalence of faking, test security and individual confidentiality.

In the same vein Bartram (2004) asserts that organisations use various forms of assessment methods to focus on selection from outside the organisation. Organisations are, however, very sensitive about how these various forms are used for

assessment as this is very much under public scrutiny in Europe. This is because assessments could harm or boost an organisation's image depending on what applicants think are the most effective methods and which are not intrusive of the individual's privacy (Anderson *et al.*, 2010).

In addition to the aforementioned sensitivity issue, Brown, Bartram, Holtzhausen, Mylonas and Carstairs (2005) found that most of the major traditional paper-and-pencil personality questionnaires are available on the Internet. Furthermore, the use of computers in the selection process has increased dramatically since its introduction into educational and psychological assessments (Joubert & Kriek, 2009). The popularity of computer-based testing can be attributed to the automation of test administration and the almost immediate scoring and interpretation of results (Buchanan & Smith, 1999). Computer-based testing also makes it easier when dealing with missing data and out-of-range responses.

Bartram (2004) is of the opinion that small and medium size organisations with fewer employees than 200 tended not to use objective assessment methods or assessment centres as a result of the high cost involved. Bartram's (2004) opinion is echoed by Zibarras & Woods (2010) who concluded that cost is the deciding factor when considering psychological assessments or assessment centres. Greenidge *et al.*'s, (2012) viewpoint, supported by Landy and Conte (2010), asserts that larger organisations tend to use more expensive selection methods such as assessment centres to select suitable candidates.

A final word on assessment is that whereas psychometric assessments were used to tap specific individual attributes required for an individual-job fit in the past, there is a current tendency in organisations to rather assess an applicant's 'attitude' towards the world of work; therefore, tests tapping integrity, personality and emotional intelligence tendencies are highly valued and used (Bartram, 2004; Branine, 2008). When considering the shift in assessment, Kwiatkowski (2003) is further of the opinion that younger people tend to regard jobs as temporary. This is because it was found that organisations offering individual development, interesting work and equitable rewards were viewed as more important than those offering job stability and longevity of employment. Organisations will need to do their utmost to recruit and retain committed applicants.

Limitations of this research

As with all micro-studies, this study has several limitations that one should take notice of when evaluating results. Literature mainly concentrates on Europe and the USA which makes local comparison difficult. In addition, due to its exploratory nature, the empirical results cannot be generalized to all organisations in the Eastern Cape. The same applies to other geographic areas in South Africa. Furthermore, the study focused on the use of recruitment and selection methods in a descriptive manner and does not explain why such methods are not popular amongst the organisations sampled.

To obtain research information on this topic for generalisation to the broader organisational population, it is recommended that future research be conducted via a larger random sampling process. In addition, such research should also focus on the rationale and motivation for methods in use. Information obtained via such an extended focus could serve as additional knowledge for recruitment and selection officials within organisations, as well as for recruitment agencies and recruitment and selection lecturing staff for a total improvement in the competitiveness of the staffing component within the region.

Conclusion

The study explored and summarized the various recruitment and selection methods in use in the Eastern Cape. The organisations that were interviewed reflected some order in the recruitment and selection process in the sense that they all have a clear recruitment and selection policy. The most profound findings on both recruitment and selection were that the methods and strategies used in the Eastern Cape were similar to those used elsewhere around the globe, however, judging by the literature review, three exceptions were found in recruitment. The first two refer to the use of walk-ins and referrals as recruitment methods that are, in accordance with the sample, not in use in the Eastern Cape. The third one is the use of online (Internet) methods to attract suitable applicants and due to many potential applicants not having access to computers, the use of online recruitment lags behind in comparison with overseas countries.

When dealing with walk-ins and referrals, it seems that the South African labour legislation may cause hesitation amongst organisations to consider referrals; a method that is seen in many parts of the world as a valuable source to recruit committed people of quality (see El-Kot & Leat, 2008; Greenidge *et al.*, 2012). In a poverty stricken Province it is recommended that labour legislation be eased to enable organisations to use initiative in the recruitment and selection of skilled workers, especially lower level jobs, which may probably improve job creation.

In order to provide more Internet access to poor applicants, a further recommendation would be that the South African Department of Labour provides online facilities in the form of 'Internet cafés' where applicants can obtain free access to advertisements, especially to lower level positions.

The study provided valuable strategic information relevant to the staffing function within organisations as well as recruitment agencies. Although the world is currently experiencing an economical downswing, recruitment agencies' relevance is re-emphasised as a significant role player in the economic processes within the region. Knowledge about the methods that are most prevalent may enhance organisational competitiveness through the appointment of more suitable applicants of quality. In addition, training and educational programmes offered within the Province can eventually be aligned accordingly

to fill the needs and gaps identified in organisational functioning and professional service delivery.

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