

Insights and Outcomes



HRM INSIGHT 6.3 A different approach to selection

This case is based on actual events and was included in the book as an example of how many of the activities carried out in HR are socially and culturally bound. While there may be universalistic humanistic values that we would like organizations to commit to and apply in the way they employ and manage people, the reality is that social and cultural norms vary and we need to be cautious in our judgements about practices that are different. Furthermore, there is increasing unease in certain quarters about the efficacy of many recruitment and selection practices in the UK. A great deal of time and resources are invested in designing what are considered appropriate procedures, which do not always produce the 'right' result in the sense that the subsequent performance of the successful candidate leaves a great deal to be desired. This is more a feature of the public sector than the private for reasons which should be clear now.

Questions

1. What was Ahmed basing his decision to offer the job on?

Ahmed based his decision on several important considerations:

- Technical competence was critical to a successful appointment, so he was interested in finding out the applicant's level of professional knowledge, qualifications, and work experience. Can he do the job needed to be answered first!
- He needed to find out about the applicant as a person. How did he come across? What behaviours did he display? What impact would he have on customers and existing employees?
- He needed to find out about his values and beliefs and about his managerial style. Would this fit into the way the business was being managed?

2. How does this way of deciding whether someone is suitable differ from the general approach taken in the UK?

This has largely been answered by the introduction, but the following points are relevant:

- Ahmed always took personal responsibility for selecting all new employees. That way he retained control over the most important aspect of running his business—who worked in it.
- He wasn't interested in procedure for procedure's sake and he wasn't tied to prescriptive legislation. His overriding concern was making the right decision for the business, not whether every applicant had been treated the same. Material rationality dominated formal rationality.
- It was a much more personal approach to selecting and one that involved a great deal of experience and professional judgement.

3. Is the UK approach likely to produce a decision that means the integrity of procedure will always identify the applicant who will add value to the organization and perform the job to the required standards?

One of the authors attended a public lecture a couple of years ago at which the speaker—from the public sector—was critical of current practice with its emphasis on procedural correctness and treating every applicant the same way. What she was arguing was that often too many of the wrong type of questions were being asked and not enough of the right kind. She was particularly concerned about the absence of questions and therefore information that cast light on the character and personality of applicants and how well they would fit into the working environment. So, the answer to the question is possibly not. It may be argued that the balance of interests has swung too far in the favour of applicants in the UK and while this is a good thing for some, we have to ask questions about the impact on the organization and its existing employees.

4. What do you think happened in the following years?

The decision to offer the job was the right one and the applicant continues to work for the business in a senior managerial capacity. This is not to say that Ahmed always gets things right. In the event that a new employee fails to meet expectations or doesn't stay long, the other employees together with Ahmed would decide on how to address the problem.