

## Is there too much Emphasis Placed on Specific Skills Knowledge When Recruiting?

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### Article

This article looks at the over-emphasis on specific skills knowledge that is evident in recruitment advertisements. This can often result in not obtaining the best range of job applicants.

Recruitment is the process of attracting suitable applicants to a vacancy or potential vacancy within a company. These applicants, of course, can be either internal or external. A review of many job advertisements, however, reveals a number of issues of concern, especially to the potential job seeker. One is the expected criteria (either implicit or explicit) that are expected to be met by the job applicant. I have noted some jobs with up to 15 criteria, although some companies are cunning and have a smaller number of criteria in which are hidden multiple areas that need to be addressed in a letter or resume. Whichever way this is approached, it still makes it difficult for the job applicant to adequately address the criteria that are considered to be an essential component of the job.

Another area is the job-specific knowledge that is required for many jobs. Now there is no denying that for a number of technical and other areas, certain specific knowledge is needed. However, there are many jobs in which this level of knowledge is not required. In fact, sometimes having too specific knowledge can be an inhibitor, restricting innovation and other new methods or ways of doing tasks.

This brings us to the reversion in use of behavioral skills, praised many times but frequently ignored in designing job criteria. These skills tend to look at the potential to do a variety of tasks rather than the ability to do a specific thing. Some behavioral skills are potentially also a better predictor of a person's predilection towards a change/development focus. Using these as your criteria can assist the interviewer to not only question the interviewee more closely, but will also allow the interviewer to study the candidate's responses in more detail. The problem is that many interviewers cannot effectively assess appropriate responses to the behavioral-style questions.

This brings us to the use of recruitment agencies in the advertising process. Recruitment agencies are a valuable resource when looking for candidates for a particular position. Unfortunately many companies, when they approach the consultants, provide too specific criteria as to

the person that they wish to employ. Some examples that have been noted by the authors in the past include "15 years of experience," normally that experience having to be in a specific industry, "specific knowledge of certain software programs," and "knowledge and procedures of particular companies". There are, of course, many others. The reality is that many of the management roles do not have these specific criteria as a necessity. Some views are that a good manager should be able to manage in a variety of roles as the skills needed are not specific requirements in many instances.

Examining these three areas in detail, many management positions have transferable skills, and this type of advertisement ignores the professional skills of potential applicants that can be adapted quite easily to many industries. Requiring the applicants to have a specific knowledge of certain software programs, for example, ignores the fact that many software programs that are used in many industries are easily taught to new applicants entering the company, as they tend to be a variation on similar ones used in other companies, normally database or spreadsheet. They are all within the learning ability of potential employees. The need to have specific knowledge and procedures that are specific to particular companies, of course implies that the company is really looking for an internal applicant or an applicant who has worked in that particular type of organisation before. Again, this is knowledge that, in many instances, can be easily picked up by new staff.

So what part should HRM play in this role? It is the true HRM professional who should provide direction. In many instances it is the line manager who provides the specific details of the type of employee he or she wishes to hire. They are the people who come up with "so many years of" ... "good knowledge of" ... "familiar with XYZ industry" among others. The HRM department, based on their knowledge of the industry and following the review of the proposed position or vacancy, should be able to recognize the difference between what can be learned on the job and what questions should be asked to demonstrate the potential of the interviewees. They should then provide behavioral-based alternatives to the restrictive requirements that may be provided by the line manager. It is these behavior-based questions that are more applicable in many instances and that will result in hiring the better employees into the company.

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