

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**A STUDY OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION  
PRACTICES IN A LARGE GOVERNMENT  
MINISTRY**



**A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
Master of Arts in Psychology  
at Massey University.**

**LEANNE BROWN**



**1999**

# ABSTRACT



This thesis examined recruitment and selection practices within a large government ministry in New Zealand. Information was gathered on all vacancies and the associated recruitment and selection practices that occurred during the calendar year of 1996. A variety of data collection methods were used to build a detailed picture of the recruitment and selection process from the perspectives of both recruiters and successful applicants. The data collection methods included a questionnaire survey of all recruiters, in-depth interviews with a sub-set of the recruiters; a questionnaire survey of all successful applicants, in-depth interviews with a sub-set of the successful applicants; and content analyses of exit interview notes, vacancy schedules and associated recruitment and selection documentation.

The results show that most of the people involved in the recruitment and selection process in the Ministry have been employed by the Ministry (or one of its predecessors) for at least five years and the majority have not had training in recruitment, selection or interviewing skills.

In general, the results indicate that, although there is some variance between different divisions, there is an emphasis on traditional methods of recruitment and selection throughout the Ministry.

The most popular methods for recruiting staff are the traditional ones utilising newspaper advertisements, curriculum vitae and one-off panel interviews. Interviews and referee checks range in terms of the degree of structure within them, with some divisions using very unstructured interviews and others using more formal interview strategies.

Recruiters perceive themselves to be reasonably successful in making selection decisions. Whilst they generally see their current selection practices as effective, they see a need for, and have a desire to learn more about, other selection methods.

Some differences were apparent when comparing recruiters' responses to applicants' responses. Most noticeable was the discrepancy between recruiters who perceived that they conveyed realistic information about the job and applicants, many of whom felt they did not receive an accurate picture of the job and were subsequently disillusioned. The use of realistic job previews was highlighted, by applicants, as a desirable tool to be added to the selection process.

The relatively high dropout rate of successful applicants indicates that the recruitment and selection process is not entirely successful. Exit interview information revealed several key reasons why individual applicants subsequently left the Ministry. Restricted career development prospects and under-utilisation of skills were two key reasons given.

The results highlight the need for a better fit between the organisation and the expectations of applicants, which will aid in the retention of successful appointees. This thesis concludes by highlighting areas in which improvements could be made to enhance the recruitment and selection process.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



A heartfelt thank you to Dr. Jocelyn Handy who provided the guidance, professional advice and supervision for this project, which was invaluable in keeping this project on track both in terms of content and timing.

Thank you to the Ministry of Commerce for allowing me the opportunity to pursue this research, in particular to the Acting Chief Advisor Human Resources for his knowledge, enthusiasm and encouragement. Thank you to the managers and staff of the Ministry who participated in this project and who shared their knowledge and thoughts with me.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a heartfelt thank you to my family. In particular, thank you to my wonderful sons Rhys and Trystan, who had a lot less of their mother's time and energy than they deserved while this project was underway. Thanks also to family and friends who stepped in from time to time to lend a hand and who gave support and encouragement when it was needed.

# CONTENTS

# PAGE

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		v
Contents		vi
List of Tables		vii
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b><u>Literature Review</u></b>	<b>10</b>
	Stage 1 – Assessing the Job	10
	Stage 2 – Attracting Applicants	12
	Stage 3 – Assessing Applicants	20
	Stage 4 – Placement and Follow-up	55
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b><u>Methodology</u></b>	<b>58</b>
	Theory	58
	The Present Research	63
	The respondents	64
	Techniques	66
	Analysis	76
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b><u>Results</u></b>	<b>80</b>
	Background	80
	The Recruiters	82
	Stage 1 – Assessing the Job	85
	Stage 2 – Attracting Applicants	87
	Stage 3 – Assessing Applicants	93
	Stage 4 – Placement and Follow-up	143
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	<b><u>Discussion</u></b>	<b>153</b>
	Stage 1 – Assessing the Job	155
	Stage 2 – Attracting Applicants	159
	Stage 3 – Assessing Applicants	159
	Stage 4 – Placement and Follow-up	166
<b><u>Appendices</u></b>		
<b>Appendix I</b>	<b>Questionnaire - recruiters</b>	
<b>Appendix Ia</b>	<b>Covering letter</b>	
<b>Appendix II</b>	<b>Questionnaire - successful applicants</b>	
<b>Appendix IIa</b>	<b>Covering letter</b>	
<b>Appendix III</b>	<b>Structured interview questions</b>	
	<b>- recruiters</b>	
<b>Appendix IV</b>	<b>Structured interview questions</b>	
	<b>- successful applicants</b>	

# LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1 Predictive validity for overall job performance ...	33
2 Selection methods across four evaluative standards	40
3 Information gathering techniques	58
4 Advertising media	88
5 Where recruiters advertise	88
6 Supply of applicants	90
7 Numbers involved in short-listing	93
8 Criteria used for short-listing	95
9 Giving information about the ministry	98
10 Information about the job and Ministry...	100
11 Value of information... recruiters' perspective	102
12 Value of information... applicants' perspective	103
13 Sources of applicant background information	105
14 The value of different types of background information – recruiters	106
15 The value of different types of background information – applicants	107
16 Type of information requested from referees	108
17 Value of type of reference – recruiters' perspective	109
18 Value of type of reference – applicants' perspective	109
19 Contact with referees	110
20 Interview format	115
21 Value of interview format – recruiters	115

22	Value of Interview format – applicants	119
23	Note-taking in the interview	120
24	Number of interviews per applicant	120
25	Number of people on the interview panel	121
26	Value of the number of interviews – recruiters	121
27	Value of the number of interviewers – recruiters	122
28	Value of the number of interviews - applicants	122
29	Value of the number of interviewers – applicants	123
30	Value of different modes of interview – recruiters	124
31	Value of different modes of interview – recruiters	124
32	Use of different selection methods	134
33	Value of different selection methods – recruiters	135
34	Value of different selection methods – applicants	136
35	Reasons for poor selection decisions	142
36	Push factors	146
37	Pull factors	146
38	Evaluation of position	147
39	Ratings of conditions of employment	147
40	Accuracy of job description	148

**FIGURE**

1	Job Type as a percentage of total vacancies	84
2	Realistic job preview	101