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**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  
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# 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.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION



The Oxford dictionary (1993) definition of recruitment is to:

*“obtain as a new employee or member of an organisation etc.,*

*to reinforce, supplement, keep up the number of”,*

and selection as

*“selecting or choosing out of a larger number on account of excellence or suitability.”*

One of the most important jobs of management is the task of recruiting and selecting the right person for the right job (Ramsey, 1994; Dessler, 1988).

The process of hiring staff is a critical one. The quality of selection decisions is recognised by many organisational psychologists as having a major impact on organisational productivity and on the achievement of organisational goals (Taylor & O’Driscoll, 1995; Iles & Robertson, 1989). Recruiting in itself can be a very expensive and time consuming task but even more costly is hiring someone who does not perform successfully in the job. Removing a non-performing appointee is stressful and more time consuming than adequately advertising, screening, interviewing and checking the applicant’s background (Ramsey, 1994).

It is difficult to accurately assess the financial, organisational and personal costs of poor selection decisions, however it is suggested that these costs are significant (Smart, 1983; Bucalo 1983). A poor fit between the recruit and the organisation may result in disillusionment, withdrawal and may culminate in the new recruit leaving the organisation. Smart (1983) compares this separation process to a divorce proceeding, which follows the courtship (recruitment phase) and the honeymoon (new employee phase). As with divorce, both parties may experience feelings of resentment, disappointment or embarrassment. It is important to get the decision right the first time by following a systematic process of staff selection and by choosing the most appropriate recruitment and selection "tools". "Gut feeling", rapport, and other subjective aspects may have a place in the recruitment and selection process but only within a structured and planned framework (Smart, 1983).

Despite the time involved and the costs of recruitment, both human and financial, there has been a dearth of systematic research and published material on recruitment and selection within the New Zealand context. George (1989) states that "information on personnel selection practices and research in New Zealand is fragmented and sparse" (p. 15), that there are no complete sources available and the information that is available is difficult to find as it is often presented along with more general information on broader issues, for example on human resource management practices.

Research internationally, has traditionally focused on isolated parts of the selection process e.g. the selection of managers or the validity and reliability of psychometric tests; or alternately, on very broad areas, e.g. across all industries and all job types.

Recommendations in the literature on how the selection process might be improved have not had a noticeable effect on practice (Di Milia, Smith & Brown, 1994; Rynes, 1993; Robertson & Makin, 1986). Many new selection methods have been developed but little research has shown how this knowledge can be used in developing selection methods for specific positions (Roe, 1989), and many organisations do not analyse the effectiveness of their selection procedures (George, 1989; Shackleton & Newell, 1989). Rynes (1993) believes that it is unlikely that selection practices will change towards greater efficiency unless suitably skilled applicants become scarce and recruiting base levels drop significantly. In addition, although research has shown that interviews are more effective when interviewers are properly trained, in practice many interviewers remain untrained (Shackleton et al, 1989).

Although a large amount of research has been carried out on the validity, fairness and utility of selection procedures, relatively little empirical research has been carried out on the reaction of job applicants to the procedures (Iles et al, 1989), and hence our knowledge of applicants perceptions of, and reactions to, selection procedures is limited (Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman & Stoffey,

1993). Additionally, most of the research that has been carried out on the dynamics of the interview, has focused on the impression that applicants have made on the recruiter, with little research on the effect of the recruiter on the applicant (Schmitt, 1976). Schmitt (1976) believes that the lack of research on applicants' reactions to the interview impacts negatively on the knowledge that we have of the interview process as a whole and that this should be an area of concern for employers who are wanting to recruit high calibre applicants in a tight labour market.

Smither et al (1993) believe that applicant reactions are important because they affect the likelihood of acceptance of a job offer, the likelihood of litigation that might come about as a result of the selection procedures, and they affect the validity and utility of the selection procedures themselves.

Studies (Harris & Fink, 1987; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976), have shown that the applicant's perceptions of interviewer characteristics, in particular how personable they are (Young & Heneman III, 1986) and how willing they are to give information to the applicant, affect the applicant's perception of job attributes, regard for the job and organisation and the likelihood of them accepting a job offer. The interviewer's interpersonal skills and willingness to give job information seems to indicate to the applicant whether or not the interviewer has an interest in employing them (Schmitt et al, 1976).

Few organisations seek feedback from applicants and organisations seeking to improve their recruitment effectiveness would benefit from considering their processes from the applicant's perspective (Rynes, 1993).

A recommendation put forward by Breugh (1992) is that recruitment be viewed as a process rather than one-off independent events. In this way the various components of the recruitment process would be linked and follow a structured pattern. The recruitment and selection process can be broken down into four connected stages - assessing the job, attracting a field of candidates, assessing the candidates and placement and subsequent follow-up (Plumbley, 1985).

These four major stages of the recruitment and selection process form the framework around which this thesis is organised. The literature review in the next chapter describes each of the four stages in greater detail. The empirical research was designed to examine the way the recruitment and selection process in a large government ministry dealt with the issues arising at each of these stages, whilst the Results section organises the research findings in terms of the stage model. Finally, the Discussion chapter discusses the recruitment and selection processes and how they are perceived, and relates them to relevant research. Information in this chapter is also presented according to the stage model used throughout.

## **Aims of the present study**

This study aims to help fill the gap in our knowledge of recruitment and selection by systematically investigating practices in a large New Zealand organisation. The organisation is a government ministry employing approximately 1,000 staff and recruiting approximately 140 new staff per year. The Ministry provides policy advice to the government, as well as delivering services to business and consumers. It recruits mainly policy and technical staff in addition to administrative and support staff. Most of the policy and technical staff that the Ministry recruits are degree qualified. The Ministry has guidelines on how to recruit and select staff, but no research has been done into how people actually apply these guidelines.

To carry out a systematic analysis, it was essential to access a wide range of information regarding recruitment and selection procedures in terms of actual practice rather than written policy. Three main strategies were used to collect the data:

1. Questionnaires were sent to all recruiters and successful applicants.
2. In-depth structured interviews were carried out with a proportion of both recruiters and successful applicants.
3. A content analysis of associated documentation was carried out.

The rationale for each of these strategies will now be described in greater detail. Questionnaire surveys were chosen to gain an overall picture of recruitment and selection practices from the perspectives of both recruiters and successful applicants. Questionnaires enabled a diverse range of information to be gathered from a large number of individuals involved in the process. In-depth interviews were chosen to add depth to the information and to aid in understanding recruitment and selection processes and how they are perceived by recruiters and successful applicants. Content analysis of associated documentation was chosen to add a further perspective. Schedules that included job descriptions, interview questions and recommendations of appointment were analysed, as were computerised human resource reports and exit interview files. Successful applicants were tracked to determine if they were still with the Ministry and if not, why they had left. Managers were asked whether successful applicants were also satisfactory employees, and if not, whether problems could be tracked back to deficiencies in the selection process. A cut-off time frame of one calendar year was chosen to make the amount of information more manageable.

The selection process is a two-way one. During this process, two simultaneous evaluations are occurring. The recruiter/s are evaluating the applicant's suitability to the position and to the organisation. This evaluation begins with the applicant's initial approach to the organisation, or on receipt of the applicant's curriculum vitae and it extends throughout the selection process until a decision

is made on the applicant's suitability. In return, the applicant is evaluating the organisation and the recruiter/s, and weighing up whether they would wish to work in such an organisation if they were offered the job. The first questionnaire in the present study looks at the evaluation process from the recruiter's perspective; the second questionnaire looks at the evaluation process from the applicant's perspective.

Questions for recruiters focused on several key areas including the selection process that they go through, the methods that they use, their perceptions of the value of various methods, power differentials on the interview panel and in decision-making, whether the successful applicant turned out to be a successful worker and to what they attributed the successful or unsuccessful appointment.

Questions for applicants focused on their perceptions of the recruitment and selection process. Several questions explored the influence of the selection panel on the applicant's decision to accept the job, and the applicant's motivation/s for accepting the job. These concepts were more fully explored in the in-depth interviews that were carried out after the questionnaires were returned and analysed. The in-depth interviews provided the forum for exploring key recruitment and selection issues in more depth as well as providing the opportunity for recruiters and applicants to ask questions of the researcher.

The three information gathering techniques – questionnaires, in-depth interviews and content analyses, provided the mechanisms for a systematic analysis of recruitment and selection processes across the Ministry.

Shackleton et al (1989) suggest that a final part of the selection process should involve analysing the process itself to determine if it is supplying the organisation with appointees who subsequently perform successfully in the job. They suggest that most organisations do not address this stage at all. This study is aimed also, at addressing this deficit in the Ministry.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**



### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, research in the areas of recruitment and selection is presented according to the stage model proposed by Plumbley (1985). Information is organised into four stages - assessing the job; attracting a field of candidates; assessing the candidates; and placement and subsequent follow-up. Stage Three – “assessing the candidates” contains research findings on short-listing and various selection methods, in addition to presenting research on the dual evaluation processes and interpersonal dynamics that occur in selection. This stage contains much information and is divided into sub-headings accordingly.

### **STAGE ONE- ASSESSING THE JOB**

#### **THE JOB ANALYSIS**

Systematic staff selection involves following a sequence of activities, beginning with an analysis of the nature of the job and of the knowledge, skills and aptitudes of the person who would best fill the position (Taylor, 1998; Pursell, Campion & Gaylord, 1980). A job analysis is designed to provide this information - information on the nature of the job, equipment used, working conditions and

the position of the job in the organisation (Arnold, Cooper & Robertson, 1995). The information gained from such a job analysis forms the basis of a job description and person specification (Boxall & Stewart, 1987). The job description contains information about the duties, responsibilities and objectives of the position, position title, who the person reports to, who they are responsible for and the purpose or reason for the job existing (Boxall et al, 1987). The person specification describes the knowledge, skills and attributes of the ideal applicant or the human qualities needed to perform successfully in the job (Boxall et al, 1987).

Developing a thorough job description and person specification is important not just for the employer but also for the applicant. Preparing a job description can help the recruiter or manager focus on how to present the positive aspects of the job, without creating unrealistic expectations (Smart, 1983). The applicant needs to know the requirements of the job and the skills they need to have in order to perform successfully in the job. An out of date job description or a generic job description may be misleading if it is not supplemented with more detailed, up-to-date information about the nature of the job. A well prepared, thorough job description also improves the quality and suitability of interview questions (Smart, 1983).

Applicants may not meet all of the criteria specified, but may still be the best person for the job. Their relative strengths and weaknesses need to be analysed in light of the person specification and job description and the degree of fit

between the individual and the organisation assessed (Fear & Chiron, 1990; Smart, 1983). In particular, thought needs to be given to which skills the applicant must have when he or she commences in the job and which ones they can be trained in or learn on the job.

Whilst a job analysis should be the first step in the selection process, time commitments and competing priorities coupled with a lack of understanding of the importance of a job analysis can often result in this step being overlooked (Shackleton et al, 1989).

## **STAGE TWO - ATTRACTING A FIELD OF CANDIDATES**

### **CHOOSING A RECRUITMENT SOURCE AND METHOD**

Once the job description and person specification are developed the appropriate source and method of recruitment can be identified, based on the nature of the specific vacancy at hand (Hodes, 1983). One way of identifying an effective method is by looking at what has worked well in the past, however, what has worked well in one situation may not work well in another. Being unaware of the most appropriate source in which to find suitable applicants may result in few qualified applicants applying (Mondy, Noe & Edwards, 1987). Once the source has been identified it can be matched with the most appropriate method.

Recruitment sources and methods can be grouped together under two main headings - internal and external. Internal sources include the promotion or

transfer of current staff members and internal methods include posting (advertising via notice boards, newsletters, computer networks and so on), and employee referrals (Schuler & Youngblood, 1986). External sources include agencies, schools, community colleges, other organisations, the unemployed, self-employed, trade associations and unsolicited applications - "walk-ins" (Mondy et al, 1987; Schuler et al, 1986). External methods include radio, newspapers, industry publications, television, specialist magazines, the Internet, private and public employment agencies, special events, executive search, networking and technical recruiters (Mondy et al, 1987; Schuler et al, 1986).

In New Zealand, external sources typically include personnel consultants, educational institutes and the New Zealand Employment Service. The most common methods of recruitment in New Zealand are newspaper advertising and employee referrals or personal contacts (Boxall et al, 1987).

Employee referrals may be the best method of obtaining good employees and newspaper advertisements the worst (Dessler, 1988). Those recruited through employee referrals tend to have both higher levels of job involvement and organisational commitment as well as higher levels of job satisfaction (Latham & Leddy, 1987). However, a serious downside is that employee referrals may maintain a homogeneous employee profile. Although this may be viewed as advantageous in some respects, it does not allow for creativity or for equal employment opportunity considerations i.e. diversity.

Recruiting through employee referrals or personal contacts is not only cheaper than newspaper advertising, employees recruited in this manner tend to stay with the organisation longer because they have a clearer, more realistic impression of what the job entails (Cook, 1993; De Witte, 1989). Individuals recruited through advertisements often have unrealistically high levels of expectation about the job. These expectations are often not lowered or countered by recruiters, who do not wish to lose quality applicants. The result is that once in the position the applicant may become disenchanted with the job and leave the organisation (De Witte, 1989).

Different recruitment sources and methods are used by different groups and some methods are more suited to particular types of vacancies than others. Newspaper advertisements and employment agencies are often the preferred recruitment methods for management positions. Newspaper and technical paper advertisements and private employment agencies are often the preferred recruitment channels for technical positions. For office and plant staff, referrals and newspaper advertisements followed by employment agencies are the preferred recruitment sources and method for many employers (Dessler, 1988).

Overall, newspapers are the most commonly used method of recruiting for they are flexible (advertisements can be large or small and can be placed or altered at short notice) and they reach a wide range and large number of people (Kaplan, Aamodt & Wilk, 1991).

Werbel & Landau (1996) suggest that recruitment theory on the effectiveness of recruitment sources may be “overly simplistic” and that “informal sources [referrals and walk-ins] do not appear to consistently provide better performing or more stable hires” (p1347). Recruitment sources may be influenced by the labour market from both a supply and demand perspective. From a supply perspective, applicants’ ages and education levels are associated with particular recruitment sources e.g. younger applicants are more likely to use college placement offices and older participants more likely to use networks or referrals. From a demand perspective, the use of recruitment sources by employers tends to differ with job type e.g. college placement offices are used more often for entry level management and professional positions, and private employment agencies are used more often for senior management positions. In contrast to earlier research results, Werbel et al (1996) found that employees recruited through college placement offices had the best performance. They concluded that an applicant’s effectiveness once in the job is more likely to be affected by selection, training and socialisation practices rather than by the initial recruitment source.

In many cases, the most suitable applicants may not be actively seeking another position at the time that the vacancy occurs. They may not be utilising the usual recruitment channels and may need to be targeted using different methods such as field recruiting, open houses and technical symposia, which provide an environment where they can approach the organisation without the need to have to directly respond to a job advertisement (Stoops, 1985).

In summary, the choice of recruitment source and method is a critical one. Some methods are better suited to particular types of positions than others and a knowledge of where the best applicants are, is equally as important a consideration. The two will determine if the organisation is successful in meeting its aim of targeting and attracting suitably qualified applicants.

## **DRAFTING AND PLACING THE ADVERTISEMENT**

There has been little systematic research or published material on recruitment advertising and yet it is a function on which many organisations spend a great deal of money (De Witte, 1989). The advertisement is often the first point of contact between the organisation and the applicant and as such plays an important role in the recruitment and selection process, but many individuals in organisations are not aware of the potential of recruitment advertising (Stoops, 1984c).

With recruitment advertising, the aim is to attract an adequate number of suitable applicants from which an ideal applicant can be found, in an optimum period of time (Mondy et al, 1987). Attracting too many applicants or too few applicants can not only be a waste of time, but a waste of money too (Ramsey, 1994; Kaplan et al, 1991). The quantity and quality of applicants who apply will show if the advertising process was successful (De Witte, 1989).

Traditionally, when a vacancy occurred within an organisation, an advertisement was placed which listed the job requirements, then applications were received and an appointment made of the most suitable candidate. This process was based on the premise that there were an adequate number of suitable job seekers in the marketplace to meet the demand. Stoops (1984a) suggests that the increasingly competitive market, particularly for technically skilled employees, has led personnel recruiters to view advertisements more as a selling tool. The recruitment advertisement can market the organisation's brand or logo and be part of an overall marketing strategy rather than a one-off instrument for employment (Kaplan et al, 1991). The aim of recruitment advertising is similar to that of product advertising and some of the same basic principles apply. According to Munsterberg (1913), in order for advertisements to have a strong impact on memory, three factors are important: they must be easily apprehendable (in terms of their colour, words, type and so on); they must make a vivid impression (by their relative size, originality/unusual form, vivid colour, use of empty spaces, appeal to humour or curiosity, to sympathy or antipathy); and the frequency of repetition needs to be considered. The recruitment advertisement should create awareness, generate interest and encourage the applicant to make a positive response (Stoops, 1984c). An advertisement that simply lists the main points from a job description or person specification will probably not result in many applications. Potential applicants compare what is offered in an advertisement to what they are currently getting or what is being offered in other advertisements. Organisations need to examine their own

strengths and benefits and emphasise these features in the job advertisement (Hodes, 1983). If the advertisement is non-specific and broad, it can appear to suit a wide range of applicants and result in too many applications, while a specific advertisement which details what is involved in the job and what it takes to do it, will serve as an effective screening tool (Ramsey, 1994). The more carefully worded and the more detailed the advertisement, the fewer unsuitable applicants will apply (Cook, 1993; Hodes, 1983).

When writing the advertisement, consideration should be given to the most suitable medium, to whether the name of the organisation should be included, the type of language to be used (formal or informal, technical or everyday), to whether there is potential for advancement (and if so this can be incorporated into the advertisement) and to the content to ensure that it complies with human rights legislation and equal employment opportunity practices (i.e. there are no references to age, gender, national origin, race and so on) (Kaplan et al, 1991; Bucalo, 1983; Hodes, 1983).

Features from the job description and person specification that might be attractive to a target audience can become a positive selling feature of the advertisement (Hodes, 1983). Although the advertisement should focus on the positive aspects of the job in order to attract applicants, it should not overemphasise the positive aspects to an extent that the duties of the position or aspects of the organisation become misrepresented or unrealistic (Magnus, 1986; Hodes, 1983).

Bucalo (1983) believes the focus in the advertisement should be on the position rather than the organisation or industry, as the applicant is usually more interested in information about the job at this early stage. Information about the organisation can be focused on later at the time of the interview. A study by De Witte (1989) looked at the relative importance of the details contained in job advertisements from the applicants' perspective. The functional requirements of the job were shown to have the most importance to applicants, followed by the job title and location and thirdly, the name of the organisation.

It is not just prospective applicants who see advertisements. Many other readers e.g. shareholders, customers and clients, see the vacancy advertisement and for many of these people the advertisement is the organisation (Stoops, 1984c). The style, format and content of the advertisement need to work together to send a consistent message about the organisation (Bucalo, 1983). The stimulus in the advertisement can be direct or indirect, but it is the total stimulus that is important not just parts of it (Stoops, 1984b).

To check the effectiveness of recruitment advertising, advertising statistics should be kept and analysed, including where the advertisement is placed, the number of total responses and the number of suitably qualified responses. When selecting the most appropriate method these statistics can help by showing which methods were the most successful in previous recruitment processes (Bucalo, 1983).

## **STAGE THREE - ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES**

### **GATHERING INFORMATION AND PREPARING A SHORT-LIST**

It is often possible to sift out one third to one half of applicants from the initial letter of application when specific information about the job has been included in the job advertisement (Plumbley, 1985). A well-designed application form aids in the task of short-listing, as does the availability of clearly defined critical factors or person specifications.

When short-listing, employers make initial decisions about the suitability of applicants by assessing their background information. The most common methods of gaining background information are through application blanks, biographical inventories, curriculum vitae and/or letters of application. Reference checking and letters of recommendation are also commonly used (Landy, 1989). A study of New Zealand organisations and personnel consulting firms (Taylor, Mills & O'Driscoll, 1993) revealed that short-listing decisions in organisations are mainly based on the information obtained from applicants' personal histories (weighted application blanks, curriculum vitae and/or application forms), whereas consulting firms tend to base their short-listing decisions on the information obtained from interviewing. They also found that most New Zealand organisations tended to use standard application forms - rarely were weighted application blanks used.

## **SELECTION METHODS – THEORY AND PRACTICE**

The core of selection is identifying those measures that predict success on the job (Taylor, 1998; Smith, 1994). There are many selection methods available that can be used to assess an applicant's suitability for a job, and each of these is based on the premise that it is able to discriminate between potential successful and unsuccessful performance on the job (Taylor et al, 1995). Although many organisations use a variety of selection instruments (e.g. application forms and interviews), most organisations are not "used to testing, or systematising or standardising interviewing, or validating their procedures" (Muchinsky, 1986 p25). Despite a wealth of information that has been published on the validity of different selection methods, employers still use methods of selection that have been shown to have poor validity (Guion, 1989; Shackleton et al, 1989; Smith & Robertson, 1986; Schmitt, 1976) and few analyse their practices to ascertain if they're effective (George, 1989). To illustrate this point, Dipboye and Gaugler (1993) state that given the choice between the best psychometric tests available and an extremely subjective unscored interview, most employers would still choose the interview.

## **INTERVIEWS**

### **The purpose of interviews**

The interview is designed to predict future job performance on the basis of an applicant's oral response to oral enquiries (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt &

Maurer, 1994). The purpose of the interview is two-fold. Firstly it is to obtain information from applicants about their suitability to the job, and secondly, to provide the applicant with information about the organisation and the job. In addition to these two primary purposes, the interview is also useful as a public relations exercise (Taylor et al, 1995; Smith & Robertson, 1993; Schmitt, 1976). Dreher, Ash & Hancock (1988) call for more research to be carried out on informal interviewing practices and argue that since organisations continue to use interviews despite previous reports of their low validity, interviewers must feel that both the formal interview itself and the associated opportunities to interact informally with candidates, add value to the selection process.

### **Their use in New Zealand and overseas**

Interviewing is the most commonly used method of selection (Taylor et al, 1995; Landy, 1989; George, 1989) and it is used almost universally (Robertson et al, 1986). Interviewing, along with personal history and reference checking, is the most popular and dominant method of selection in New Zealand (Taylor et al, 1993; George, 1989). A survey by Taylor et al (1993) showed that whilst consulting firms in New Zealand tended to use only one interviewer, most larger organisations tended to use two or three interviewers. The position manager was usually an interviewer and peers were sometimes involved, but only rarely were subordinates involved in interviewing.

A survey of management selection practices in Europe by Shackleton & Newell (1994) found that interviews are common in Belgium, Italy and to a lesser extent

in Germany, although there are differences in the way they are conducted. Italian companies tend to use more than one interview and each interview usually involves more than one interviewer, although panel interviews are rare. Line managers are involved in the process rather than personnel staff and often an internal consultant is also involved. In Belgium samples, the use of more than one interview is common and both line managers and personnel staff are typically involved. Interviews are usually one-to-one, but two to three interviewers or a panel are also utilised. German companies tend to use only one interview per applicant. Two to three interviewers are usually involved and both personnel staff and line managers participate. The samples of personnel directors from all three countries reported the interview as not only the most common method of selection, but also as the most successful.

The interview along with the application form and reference are the main methods of recruitment in Britain (Cook, 1993). Robertson et al (1986) conducted a survey of management selection practices that showed that two-thirds of British organisations usually used two or more interviews. It also revealed a preference for two to three interviewers and for line management involvement rather than personnel staff. Shackleton & Newell (1991) carried out a follow-up survey which found that although the use of interviews was still widespread (94.5%), there were changes in the way interviews were carried out. The latter survey found that there were even fewer companies using only one interview per

applicant and there was also a decrease in one-to-one interviews and an associated increase in panel interviews.

A survey by Di Milia et al (1994) which compared management selection practices in Australia with British and French findings, revealed similar practices in Australia. Australian companies tended to have more than one interview with each applicant and to use more than one interviewer, although line managers are used less in Australia as interviewers, than in Britain. Differences were found between public (government) and private sector organisations in the Australian sample. Public sector organisations used application forms more and carried out interviews that were usually single interviews with two or three interviewers. The authors suggest that the use of several interviewers in the public sector may be because of equal employment opportunity legislation and spreading the responsibility for an employment decision over a team rather than it resting on just one individual.

### **The structure, reliability and validity of interviews**

Interviews have typically been seen as lacking in validity and reliability to a large extent because of their lack of standardisation (Schmitt, 1976). Certain types of interviews (i.e. unstructured ones) have been shown to have little usefulness in predicting future job performance (Smith et al, 1993) and yet unstructured interviews are still widely used (Shackleton et al, 1991). Early studies (from 1949 to 1982) placed the validity of structured interviews at around  $r = .19$  and of ability tests higher at  $r = .45$  (Dipboye et al, 1993). Later studies were not as

pessimistic regarding the validity of interviews (Harris, 1989). A more recent study by Wiesner & Cronshaw (1988) placed the validity of the structured interview higher (corrected mean  $r = .62$ ) and unstructured interviews much higher than in previous studies (corrected mean  $r = .31$ ). In these later studies, structured interviews have been shown to have a validity equivalent to ability tests (Dipboye et al, 1993).

Structured interview questions, when based on a comprehensive job analysis, can tap into many skill and ability areas required for the job (Wiesner et al, 1988). When applicants are asked the same job relevant questions and their answers are assessed using specifically anchored rating scales, the structured interview produces much higher levels of validity than other types of interviews (Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995). The predictive validity of the interview increases when the interview increases in structure (Taylor, 1998; Wiesner et al, 1988) and in its job-relatedness. Structured interviews also have higher inter-rater reliability (Wright, 1969; Mayfield, 1964). Highest validity and advances in validity over other predictors are associated with interviews described as systematic, designed, structured or guided (Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965). Situational interviews, competency based interviews, behavioural description interviews fall into these categories of interviews (Taylor, 1998).

Structured interviews lessen the likelihood that confirmatory questioning (to confirm pre-interview impressions) will occur (Binning, Goldstein, Garcia & Scatteregia, 1988). Structured interviews when based on a thorough knowledge

of the nature of the job and when carried out by well-trained interviewers, can be as valid a selection tool as any other (Guion, 1989).

### **Interview questions**

The type and form of interview questions directly influences the quality of the information gained from the interview (Mayfield, 1964). Questions should be job related, bias-free, clear, consistent across applicants, appropriate and open-ended. Asking specific job-related questions can improve the reliability and validity of the interview (Taylor et al, 1995). Questions should flow from job-related factors, their assessment criteria and from the information gained from the applicant (Goodale, 1989). Long questions or multiple questions should be avoided.

Tengler and Jablin (1983) note that although it is recognised that questions play an important role in employment interviews, little research has been carried out on how questions, both recruiters' and applicants', affect the other party's responses both in terms of behaviour and attitude.

Questions in the interview serve to facilitate the exchange of information between the interviewer and interviewee (Tengler et al, 1983). In general terms, questions can be open, allowing the respondent to talk or expand on a topic; closed, which limits the response; primary, which brings in new topics to the interview; or secondary, which allows for probing and following up on previously given information.

Often in an interview, questions will be used in a funnel or inverted funnel formation. In the former, open questions are initially used and then followed with more specific closed questions as the interview progresses. The opposite holds for inverted funnel formats. They begin with closed questions and progress to more open probing questions. The format affects the amount of information that the applicant can use to present him/herself in different parts of the selection process. As interviewers may make up their minds about the applicant's suitability (or lack of it) in the first few minutes of an interview, the questioning format in the first part of the interview is critical. A study by Springbett (1958) found that interviewers typically reach a final decision on the applicant in the first four minutes of the interview, although subsequent studies have shown that a number of factors may effect the timing of the decision, including the pre-determined length of the interview and applicant quality (Buckley & Eder, 1988). Tengler et al (1983) found that the length of applicants' question responses significantly increased, as interviewers asked more open-ended questions and as they asked more secondary questions.

The use of a structured interview guide with the same questions asked of each applicant reduces the effect of bias in the interview (Smith et al, 1993), although if the questions are focused on the wrong content, they can be as ineffective as having no questions at all (Goodale, 1989).

A study by Campion, Campion & Hudson (1994) found that both situational questions (focusing on future behaviour) and behavioural description questions (focusing on past behaviour) had high validity and proposed that the use of both types of questions, rather than the exclusive use of one type, may be more effective and provide greater flexibility in the interview.

### **Other influencing factors**

A study carried out by Langdale & Weitz (1973) looked at the influence of job information on selection decisions. They found that inter-rater reliability was much higher for interviewers who had more complete information about the job and that they discriminated more amongst applicants. This highlights the implications of conducting a sound job analysis in order to gain detailed information about the job. It also highlights the importance of interviewer preparation.

Lewis (1980) suggests that employing communication techniques that are traditionally associated with counselling in the employment interview, may result in a greater flow of information between interviewer and applicant, by conveying understanding, honesty and acceptance. Wright (1969) draws attention to the importance of, and the scant research on, the role of semantics in the selection interview. According to Wright (1969), words have different meanings to different people and they are connected to interviewer-interviewee rapport, interviewer bias and the decision-making processes.

## **Interviews - conclusions**

Despite many differences in results, most studies have found in general that interviews do predict job performance at least to some extent and that structured interviews are a more valid selection tool than unstructured ones (Harris, 1989). They remain the most common (Taylor et al, 1995; George, 1989; Ulrich et al, 1965) and widely preferred method of selecting staff (Wright, 1969). Like other selection methods, the interview is designed to be predictive of success in subsequent employment. This success can be measured in terms of job performance, training success, promotion and tenure (Wiesner et al, 1988).

## **OTHER COMMONLY USED SELECTION METHODS**

Some other commonly used methods of selection include psychological tests, work samples, situational exercises, biographical data (biodata), peer assessments, self-assessments, letters of reference and assessment centres (Muchinsky, 1986). Cognitive tests, work samples, biodata, peer and supervisor evaluations and assessment centres have been shown to be reasonable predictors of job performance. References, personality questionnaires and interest inventories, along with the interview have been shown to predict job performance, but to a lesser extent (Iles et al, 1989). There are also other "weird and wonderful" measures as defined by Cook (1993) which include such things as graphology, palmistry and pseudo tests which have been shown to have little or no validity in predicting job performance.

## **Psychological tests**

Psychological tests are standardised measuring instruments, their application "limited to the type of person and type of situation for which it [the test] was prepared" (Shouksmith, 1978). Tests used in selection must be valid, reliable, appropriate to the job and organisation and be used for the purpose for which they were designed (Rudman, 1991).

Munsterberg, as early as 1913, presented the challenge of selection as the need to "analyse definite economic tasks with reference to the mental qualities which are necessary for them, and we have to find methods by which these mental qualities can be measured" (p57). He suggested that the "vocational demands" and "personal function" be analysed equally "with scientific thoroughness" (p57), the end result being a good fit between the chosen occupation and the individual.

Psychological tests strive to fulfil this function today. They are systematic and standardised procedures for gaining a sample of responses from an applicant which can be used to assess psychological characteristics by comparing the results with a norm group (Smith et al, 1993). They aim to minimise bias and subjectivity by controlling timing, conditions, instructions, administration, and interpretation. They are viewed by many as more scientific, perhaps because the results are more quantifiable than other methods such as the interview.

Tests form one part of the information gathering and decision-making processes in selection and the results should be considered along with information gained from the interview, reference checking and other selection tools that have been employed to assess the applicant (Rudman, 1991). They can be a major help in the decision-making process but they do not make the decision. Managers need to evaluate the results in light of their own judgements (Guion, 1989).

For a test to be a good predictor, it must measure mental qualities that influence important aspects of job performance (Bethell-Fox, 1989). There are two main types of tests that are used for selection – cognitive and personality (Bethell-Fox, 1989). Two studies revealed that cognitive ability tests are used infrequently in New Zealand by both large organisations and by personnel consultants (Taylor et al, 1993; Dakin & Armstrong, 1989), although the use of psychological tests has increased since the 1970s, particularly for senior positions (Langridge, 1988).

The use of psychological tests is more common in the United States where a survey by Ryan & Sackett (1987) of industrial/organisational psychologists found that 84.7% used ability tests when assessing applicants for selection and the same percentage used personality inventories when assessing for selection purposes.

A survey of management selection practices by Robertson et al (1986) found that almost two-thirds of British organisations did not use personality tests and

over 70% did not use cognitive tests. Their results showed that as organisations increased in size, so did the use of tests. Shackleton et al (1991) carried out a follow-up survey of British companies and found that personality tests had increased in their use from 12% to 37%, and cognitive tests from 9.3% to 41.1%. A comparative survey by Di Milia et al (1994) revealed that French companies used personality tests more than British and Australian companies. 17% of French companies always used personality tests, 12.1% of Australian companies always used them and 9.6% of British companies always used them. British companies were more likely to use cognitive tests – 69% of British companies used them compared to 56.2% of Australian companies and 48.9% of French companies. A survey of management selection practices by Shackleton et al (1994) showed that psychological tests are used relatively widely in Belgium, but infrequently in Germany and Italy.

### **Ability and aptitude tests**

Ability and aptitude tests have consistently been shown to be useful in predicting job performance (Hunter & Schmidt, 1982), across a wide range of occupations (Arnold et al, 1995). Schmitt et al (1984) reported a validity coefficient of .248 for general mental ability tests, .268 for aptitude tests and .315 for physical ability tests. The meta-analysis by Hunter & Hunter (1984) gave a validity coefficient of .53 for ability tests.

Schmidt & Hunter (1998) recently carried out research related to general mental ability (GMA) tests. They established the validity of nineteen selection methods

(the most relevant to the present research are presented in the table below) and also established the validity of paired combinations of general mental ability tests (GMA) and eighteen other selection methods.

**TABLE 1: PREDICTIVE VALIDITY FOR OVERALL JOB PERFORMANCE OF GMA SCORES COMBINED WITH A SECOND METHOD**

	Validity	Multiple R	Gain in validity from adding method	% increase in validity
GMA test (alone)	.51			
Work sample	.54	.63	.12	24%
Structured interview	.51	.63	.12	24%
Unstructured interview	.38	.55	.04	8%
Peer ratings	.49	.58	.07	14%
Reference checks	.26	.57	.06	12%
Biographical data	.35	.52	.01	2%
Assessment centres	.37	.53	.02	4%

*(source: Schmidt & Hunter, 1998)*

These results show that the addition of a GMA test to the selection methods listed, raises their validity. This is especially pronounced for work samples and structured interviews, and to a lesser extent for peer ratings and reference checks. Schmidt et al (1998) suggest that the reason some methods have only a small increase in validity with the addition of a GMA, is that they correlate highly with the GMA. Biographical data measures may indirectly mirror mental ability to some extent and assessment centres often include a measure of GMA in them. As the table sets out, the combination of a structured interview and a GMA test seems to be both an attractive (in terms of validity) and a cost-effective procedure (Schmidt et al, 1998).

## **Personality tests**

Personality tests aim to identify general personality traits which are matched to ideal profiles for different occupations or work groups (Rudman, 1991). There has been a great deal of interest and debate with regard to the use of personality tests for selection (Cooper & Robertson, 1986). Validity coefficients have been relatively low for personality tests, however, despite this, they have continued to be used in selection (Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991).

The relationship between personality and performance is not well established and the goal for personality tests is to show that they are appropriately job-related (Rudman, 1991). It is well-recognised that personality can be broken down into several dimensions. Although there has been some debate as to the number of dimensions, their labels and their definitions (e.g. Block, 1995), there is, in general, agreement amongst researchers that personality can be classified in terms of five relatively independent dimensions - extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barrick et al (1991) conducted a study that investigated the relationship of the "Big Five" personality dimensions to job performance criteria. Of the five dimensions, they found one dimension - conscientiousness, to be to be a valid predictor of all three job performance criteria (job proficiency, training proficiency and personnel data) across all of the occupational groups studied (professionals, police, managers, sales and skilled/ semi-skilled).

Although early reviews reported low correlations for personality tests, they may be effective in predicting productivity if used properly (Cook, 1993). A study by Tett et al (1991), produced a corrected estimate of .24 for the overall correlation between personality and job performance. Their results supported the use of personality scales in personnel selection. They concluded that individual differences present a challenge to selection decision-makers, which requires the careful analysis of both the job and the person.

Robertson & Kinder (1993) investigated the criterion-related validity of personality variables using twenty validation studies of the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ). They found that for some criterion areas, personality scales produced useful criterion-related validity which was comparable with the coefficients from meta-analyses of assessment centres, cognitive ability tests and work samples and that personality scales provided unique, additional criterion-related information beyond that provided by cognitive ability tests.

Schmit, Stierwalt, Ryan & Powell (1995) suggest that personality tests, when used for personnel selection, may need items or instructions that provide a frame of reference related to the workplace. General personality tests may not reveal much about how an applicant would act in a work situation as applicants have no frame of reference in which to consider the specified behaviours. In their studies, in which they used the NEO-FFI, they found that validity was highest in the condition in which context specific items were used, and was almost zero when

general context items were used. They concluded that using context-specific items in personnel selection results in less error in prediction and in higher validity than general personality items.

A study using a sample of accountants, by Day and Silverman (1989), found that scores on specific job related personality scales were related to key aspects of job performance and that this was "over and above what can be predicted by using cognitive ability measures alone" (p34). They concluded that "choosing work-related personality measures on the basis of information gathered from a thorough job analysis can help improve employee selection" (p35).

### **Biographical data**

Biographical data is usually readily available in the selection process and is collected through application forms or biographical questionnaires. Biographical measures can be difficult and time consuming to develop, but once developed they are easy to use (Schmidt et al, 1998). Biographical questionnaires are designed to elicit more information than the basic details that are usually requested on an application form (Smith et al, 1993). They contain questions about previous life experiences e.g. at school, family life, hobbies and so on, which are chosen because they have been shown to correlate with job performance (Schmidt et al, 1998). Biographical measures operate on the premise that future behaviour can be predicted by past behaviour (Muchinsky, 1986) and have been found to be a relatively good predictor of job performance (Smith et al, 1993; Hunter et al, 1984). They have been used to predict

performance in jobs ranging from blue-collar unskilled jobs to professional and management jobs (Schmidt et al, 1998). A survey by Robertson et al (1986), showed that whilst only a small number (5.8%) of organisations in Britain were using biodata for management selection, its use was increasing. The subsequent survey of management selection practices by Shackleton et al (1991) placed the use of biodata at 19.1% of British organisations and 3.8% of French organisations. The comparative survey of management selection methods in Australian organisations carried out by Di Milia et al (1994) showed a similar frequency (18.2%) of use to Britain. The survey by Dakin et al (1989) placed the use of biographical inventories in New Zealand Personnel consultancies at 4.1%.

### **Peer evaluations**

Peer evaluations involve applicants assessing each other. Peers appear to be more honest and open with each other and this may account for peer assessments having higher validity than other types of assessment e.g. supervisor/subordinate assessments (Muchinsky, 1986).

Peer evaluations may be of little value if the applicant is from outside the organisation, but they have been shown to have relatively high validity when used for applicants within the organisation - i.e. for promotion (Smith et al, 1993). Although they can not be used for initial selection if applicants do not know one another, they can be used for secondary selection or for training and development (Muchinsky, 1986).

## **Assessment centres**

Assessment centres, where applicants are given a battery of tests over a period of several days, provide more information on which the selection decision can be made (Rudman, 1991). Assessment centres can last from one day to several days during which time applicants undertake a number of exercises which usually consist of one or more ability tests, personality tests, exercises such as a leaderless group discussion and an in-depth structured interview (Schmidt et al, 1998). Assessment centres have increased in popularity (Arnold et al, 1995; Tziner, 1990), and the use of assessment centres has increased, although they are usually only used in large organisations or when recruiting a large number of applicants (Shackleton et al, 1989; Robertson et al, 1986). Two New Zealand studies (Taylor et al, 1993; Dakin et al, 1989), revealed that assessment centres are used infrequently in New Zealand, whereas a survey by Robertson et al (1986) of British organisations found that assessment centres were used by 21.4% of British organisations for management selection. A follow-up survey by Shackleton et al (1991) showed the use of assessment centres in British organisations for management selection to have increased three-fold in the five years since the Robertson et al (1986) survey. A further study of management selection practices (Di Milia et al, 1994) placed the use of assessment centres in British organisations at approximately 57%; their use in Australian organisations at approximately 22% and in French organisations at 19%. A comparative survey of three European countries (Belgium, Germany and Italy) by Shackleton et al,

(1994), revealed that British and German companies tend to use assessment centres more than other countries and that Germany and Italy rarely use psychological tests in assessment centres (60% of German companies made some use of assessment centres, while only 20% made use of psychological tests). In Britain, psychological tests are an essential part of assessment centres.

Assessment centres have been shown to have moderate to high validity (Klimoski & Brickner, 1987). A meta-analysis of assessment centre research by Gaugler, Rosenthal, Thornton & Bentson (1987) yielded a mean validity coefficient (corrected for sampling error, restriction of range and criterion unreliability) of .37. They also found a number of variables across samples. Validity was higher when a large number of assessment devices were used and when peer evaluations were used. Assessment centres have the same face validity as work sample tests and job simulations, for they utilise these (for example in-basket exercises) as well as other methods such as group discussions. Assessment centres have been shown to work in predicting managerial success regardless of educational level, prior experience in an assessment centre, race or gender. They have been used in a wide variety of occupational settings and have been shown to be useful for a variety of purposes in addition to selection. Interestingly, it is not fully understood why assessment centres work as well as they do (Klimoski et al, 1987).

## Work Samples

Like assessment centres, work samples and job simulations also provide the applicant with detailed, realistic tasks that are similar to those performed on the job (Rudman, 1991). Having experienced a taste of the job, the applicant can then decide if they wish to pursue their application or to withdraw from the process, i.e. to self-select (Iles et al, 1989; Robertson et al, 1986). Applicants tend to see work samples and job simulations as fairer and more job related than paper and pencil tests (Iles et al, 1989; Rynes, Heneman & Schwab, 1980). In addition, work samples have been shown to have a high mean validity where current performance is the basis for promotion (Hunter et al, 1984).

In New Zealand, work samples are utilised infrequently (Taylor et al, 1993; Dakin et al. 1989).

## A comparison of various selection methods

The table below illustrates, in broad terms, the relative validity of various selection methods, their fairness, applicability and cost.

**TABLE 2: SELECTION METHODS ACROSS FOUR EVALUATIVE STANDARDS**

SELECTION METHOD	Validity	Fairness	Applicability	Cost
Intelligence tests	moderate	Moderate	high	low
Aptitude & Ability tests	moderate	High	moderate	low
Personality & Interest tests	moderate	High	low	moderate
Interviews	low	moderate	high	moderate
Work samples	high	high	low	high
Situational Exercises	moderate	unknown	low	moderate
Biographical information	high	moderate	high	low
Peer assessments	high	moderate	low	low
Self- assessments	low	high	moderate	low
Letters of reference	low	unknown	high	low
Assessment centres	high	high	low	high

Source: Muchinsky (1986)

Research has shown that the most successful recruitment and selection decisions are those that combine information from several selection methods which tap into the core skill requirements of the position (Rudman, 1991). Using information from only one method may lead to poor selection decisions. This is compounded even more when the one method has low validity.

### **TRANSLATING THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH INTO ACTUAL PRACTICE**

Although researchers have learnt a great deal in recent times about the employment interview, little of this information has found its way into practice (Hakel, 1989). Less effective selection methods may still be in use because practitioners have not publicised the positive aspects of the best selection tests to recruiters and selectors (Guion, 1989). A New Zealand study conducted by Dakin et al (1989) revealed that many recruiters were not aware of which methods were better predictors of job performance than others. Taylor et al (1993) conducted two surveys in New Zealand organisations, which lent support to this conclusion. They found that many respondents believed certain selection methods to have higher validity than research had shown them to have in practice. They suggest that "improved dissemination of research results may lead to increased adoption of more valid selection methods" (p19). In addition to a lack of knowledge of the validity of various selection methods, they put forward two other reasons why many organisations in New Zealand may not be using more valid methods, namely, the high development costs of methods such as

assessment centres and the perceived potential for adverse impact on racial minorities that is often associated with cognitive ability tests.

## **RECRUITER/APPLICANT INTERACTIONS**

Most organisations wish to make a good impression on the applicant whether or not the applicant is successful in obtaining the job (Taylor, 1998). Research has traditionally focused on recruitment and selection methods from the recruiter's or organisation's perspective (Thornton, 1993; Rynes et al, 1983; Harris et al, 1987). Recruiters make decisions about the applicant, however, the applicant is simultaneously making decisions about the organisation and whether she or he would like to work in such an organisation (Rynes et al, 1983). The applicant's decision-making process has been neglected in research (Harn & Thornton, 1985), as has the behaviour of recruiters as perceived by applicants (Rynes et al, 1983).

Applicants often have little knowledge of the recruiting organisation and may rely on the recruiters and the recruiting situation to give them an insight into what the organisation is like. The interviewer's perceived personality, his or her manner and willingness to give job information, impact on the applicant's assessment of the interviewer, the organisation and in turn, on whether the applicant would accept the position if it was offered to them (Rynes, 1993; Schmitt et al, 1976).

## **REALISTIC JOB PREVIEW**

Recruiters often strive to portray a positive image of the job and the organisation to the applicant. Research suggests that recruiters tend to portray too positive a picture in order to entice the best (or most qualified) person into the position. This may lead to subsequent disenchantment and disappointment for the applicant once they are in the job (Wanous, 1980). Viewing the recruitment function in the same way as the marketing function may exacerbate the tendency, by recruiters, to oversell the position (Rynes, 1993).

It is important when recruiting staff, that the positive aspects of a job are conveyed but that the duties are also presented realistically. A realistic job preview is designed to bring an applicant's expectations down to a more realistic level (Popovich & Wanous, 1982) and thus prevent subsequent dissatisfaction.

Various studies have shown that giving applicants a realistic description of the job has positive effects both for the applicant and the organisation (Meglino, DeNisi & Ravlin, 1993). Positive effects include increased job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, performance and retention (Meglino et al, 1993; Premack & Wanous, 1985; Wanous, 1980). Realistic job previews are believed to be beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, by giving detailed information to the applicant they enable the applicant to opt out of the selection process if they feel that their skills and hopes do not match the duties and possibilities of the job (Saks, Wiesner & Summers, 1994). Secondly, by providing the applicant with a

reasonably clear idea of job content prior to them accepting the job, the possibility or severity of subsequent role ambiguity is decreased. Thirdly, by providing applicants with information on the more mundane, negative aspects of the job, applicants tend to have lower and more realistic job expectations (Saks & Cronshaw, 1990). In addition, realistic job previews can make the organisation appear honest (Wanous, 1977).

Research has revealed that applicants prefer that the information they receive about the job be detailed, specific, relevant and enable them to distinguish one job from another and that includes negative as well as positive information. This is reflected in their choice of interviews over brochures and contact with potential co-workers over contact with recruiters. Although they prefer that information be realistic, they do not wish it to be overly negative (Rynes, 1993).

The effects of realistic job previews on recruitment and selection may not be as straightforward as originally believed (Meglino et al, 1993). Studies such as the one carried out by Meglino et al (1993) show that employees are more likely to accept a job offer if they have had a realistic job preview. However, this effect seems to apply mainly to applicants who have had little or no prior exposure to the job. For these individuals, the realistic job preview may balance out the positive aspects of the job. They tend to place less weight on the negative aspects and therefore see the job as more desirable than applicants with prior exposure. Indeed, the negative aspects may even contribute towards the applicant accepting the job for they may see these aspects as a challenge, as

something to be overcome (Meglino, Ravlin, & DeNisi, 1997). For individuals with prior job exposure, receiving negative information about the job tends to compound with the knowledge they already have, resulting in the negative information being given more weight and the job viewed in a less favourable light (Meglino et al, 1997) and they are more inclined to turn down the job offer.

The use of realistic job previews is increasing in the United States. Films, brochures and visits are utilised (Cook, 1993). Although many methods have been used to give realistic job previews, the choice of the medium does not appear to be based on previously published research on attitude change (Popovich et al, 1982). The source, message, channel and audience factors of realistic job previews all impact on their effectiveness. A study by Saks et al (1990) revealed that an oral realistic job preview was more effective in terms of enhancing the perception of organisation and interviewer honesty. Both oral and written realistic job previews were effective in lowering applicants' job expectations and in increasing role clarity, and both had a significant effect on the applicants' knowledge of the job.

Guion (1989) believes that being honest with the applicant i.e. using a realistic job preview strategy, makes selection more of a joint decision making process and gives it more in common with job or career development counselling.

## **THE EVALUATION AND SELECTION DECISION**

### **Evaluating the applicants**

The main role of recruiters is to gain information, evaluate it and come to a final decision (Springbett, 1958). Compton and Nankervis (1991) suggest that the decision to choose one particular applicant over another is perhaps the most difficult part of the selection process. All of the information gathered - the application form, documentation, test results, interview impressions and so on, needs to come together to form the basis on which the applicant will be evaluated. This information is compared to the requirements set out in the job description and person specification. In this way the selection criteria developed at the beginning of the process becomes the basis on which the final decision is made (Compton et al, 1991).

Information that is not supplied can affect the selection decision as well as information that is supplied (Rudman, 1991). A study by Jagacinski (1995) found that recruiters tend to penalise the applicant for missing information i.e. applicants with missing test scores were rated lower (even when it wasn't their fault that the information was missing) than comparable subjects who had an average score on the missing test. She surmised that recruiters might not want to take a risk in employing someone with a missing score, as the applicant may be deficient in the skill tested. Employing a poorly qualified applicant is seen to be worse than passing up a qualified one. As Springbett (1958) expresses it – if

recruiters make a good selection decision, they will probably not hear much more about it and if they pass up a good applicant by not appointing them, then this mistake will probably go unnoticed. However, if they choose the wrong applicant there will be major repercussions. Some of these may include managing poor performance, recruiting a new person to take the place of the non-performer, low staff morale and loss of face from making a poor decision. Therefore recruiters are cautious and tend to place more weight on negative information.

A recruiter may form an opinion of the applicant prior to meeting them and this may be a source of bias (Eder & Ferris, 1989). A recruiter's initial impressions of an applicant gained through application forms, test scores, letters of reference and so on, may effect their overall assessment of the applicant's suitability for the job (McDonald & Hakel, 1985; Dipboye, 1982). Research conducted by Binning et al, 1988, supported the hypothesis that interviewers questioning strategies serve to confirm their earlier impressions of the applicant, however McDonald et al (1985) found that although initial impressions played a part in their results, interviewers did not tend to employ an interviewing strategy that was related to their initial impressions of applicants. A number of situational variables may come into play in the interview, which moderate the effects of pre-interview impressions and questioning strategies (Binning et al, 1988).

The interviewer's pre-interview impression of the applicant may influence the way they themselves behave in the interview. If they gained a positive impression, they may engage in encouraging and positive verbal and non-verbal

behaviour, for example, nodding, smiling, talking longer and generally looking interested in the applicant and what the applicant has to say; if they gained a negative impression, they may convey disinterest in the applicant. This behaviour may in turn influence the applicant to respond in a like manner and hence serve to confirm the interviewer's initial impressions (the self-fulfilling prophesy).

In addition, cognitive distortion may occur as an interviewer's post interview evaluations may be based on recollections that confirm earlier impressions, rather than on actual behaviour. Cognitive distortion may also affect what the interviewer takes notice of in the interview (he or she may weight some responses or behaviours more than others) and what they recall from the interview. A study by Dipboye, Stramler & Fontenelle (1984) found that applicants who had previously supplied a good application were rated as having answered the interviewer's questions better than those who supplied poor applications, regardless of actual performance in the interview. The details in the application form had an effect both on the interviewer's ratings and on the interviewer's recall of information from the interview. Another study showed that interviewers who previewed the application gathered more non-application information and made less reliable evaluations of the applicant's fit to the job and performance in the interview (Dipboye, Fontenelle and Garner, 1984). Springbett's studies (1958) revealed several findings: that the appearance of the applicant and their application form provide information in the first few minutes of

an interview and this information affects the final outcome; that information in the application form contributes most to the final decision; the search in the interview is mainly for negative information, and if the applicant is not assessed favourably on both their application and their appearance, their chances of being accepted are low, and when both are rated favourably, the applicants chances are higher than when their application form is rated before their appearance.

Factors such as an applicant's race and disability may affect the interviewer's impression of the applicant prior to the interview. Studies (e.g. Gilmore, Beehr & Love, 1986; Beehr & Gilmore, 1982) have found that an applicant's physical attractiveness, particularly if it is perceived by recruiters to be beneficial to the job, affects the selection decision (Dipboye, 1982). Personal liking of the applicant may be a strong bias when making the selection decision. A study by Anderson and Shackleton (1990) revealed that interviewers, when recruiting graduates across various occupational groups, preferred applicants who were interesting, relaxed, strong, successful, active, mature, enthusiastic, sensitive, pleasant, honest, dominant and who maintained good eye contact.

A study by Paunonen, Jackson & Oberman (1987) found support for the hypothesis that applicant personality characteristics, as perceived by recruiters, were an important part of the selection process. When the perceived person-job match (in terms of personality characteristics) was greater, so too were the ratings regarding the applicant's suitability for the job and the greater the recruiter's likelihood of offering the applicant the job.

Evaluating each applicant after their interview on a pre-determined scoring sheet (on which applicants are rated against critical factors) is one way of minimising bias in this part of the process. If scoring is left until the last applicant has been seen, it is easier to rate the last applicant more favourably (or less favourably). Human nature demands that we compare one person against another (or one applicant against the previous one - Carlson, 1968) rather than each against a set standard. Valid comparisons can only be made when similar information is obtained from all applicants (Taylor et al, 1995). Mayfield (1964) believes that using a structured rating form leads to a more equal weighting of information and this may, in part, explain why structured interviews have higher inter-rater reliability. When making the final evaluation, the applicant's assets are weighed against their shortcomings and how these will translate into successful job performance (Fear et al, 1990).

There has been a call for more research to be carried out in this area. Mayfield (1964) believes that research should be applied to investigating the decision-making process in the interview and Goodale (1989) believes that the way interviewers evaluate the information they gain from applicants when making selection decisions, both in terms of theory and practice, needs much more attention applied to it.

## **Evaluating the interviewer/organisation**

As mentioned previously, the decision-making process in selection is not limited to the organisation assessing the applicant. It is a two way one process with the interviewer and applicants simultaneously assessing each other (Shackleton & Anderson, 1987).

Three types of theories have been put forward on how factors in the selection process affect an applicant's decision-making (Young et al, 1986; Behling, Labovitz & Gainer, 1968). Objective theories state that applicants are influenced by economic incentives, for example pay, holidays, nature of the work, opportunities for advancement, incentives and so on. Each of these factors is weighted in terms of its importance to the applicant and then the results are averaged for an overall indication of the desirability of the organisation/job (Behling et al, 1968). Subjective theories purport that an applicant's decision-making occurs on a personal and emotional level and is influenced by their perceptions of the organisation's work climate. The third type of theory, critical contact theory, assumes that the applicant cannot make a decision according to the first or second theory because their contact with the organisation is of too limited a nature and too infrequent to allow them to differentiate between organisations. Many organisations offer similar salary packages and portray similar images to applicants and applicants therefore search for other factors on which to base their decision. Critical contact theory emphasises the influence of particular individuals encountered by the applicant at various stages of the

selection process, who are perceived as being representative of the organisation (Glueck, 1973).

There are implications from these three theories for the way applicants are recruited. The objective theories argue that to increase the likelihood of recruiting high calibre applicants, organisations should pay well and provide good incentives. Subjective theories argue in favour of the organisation presenting a good public relations image to applicants and the critical contact theories argue that using professional, impressive recruiters aids in the task of recruiting high calibre applicants. In practice, applicants may use factors from all three theories in their decision making, depending upon the circumstances (Behling et al, 1968).

A study by Taylor & Bergmann (1987) looked at a range of recruitment activities and applicant reactions across the various stages of recruitment. They found that recruitment activities influenced applicant reactions at the initial interview stage. Recruiter demographic characteristics, interview characteristics and applicant perceptions of recruiter empathy were related to organisational attractiveness and likelihood of the applicant accepting a job offer. In the later stages of the recruitment process, job attributes (e.g. location, salary, job title) had a stronger relationship with applicant reactions. They surmised that recruitment effects were stronger in the initial stages as applicants had little other information to base their assessment on. In later stages, when applicants have access to more detailed information about the job, recruitment activities have very little effect.

A 30-year study by Jurgensen (1978) gathered information from applicants on what factors were important to them in a job. They were also asked to rank what factors they felt were important to other people in a job. Overall, male applicants rated security as the most important factor, and working conditions the least important. A trend for men was to rank the type of work higher over the time of the study and benefits and pay were ranked higher over time for both male and female applicants. Younger men (under 20 years) gave greater importance to co-workers, hours of work, pay, supervisor and working conditions and less importance to advancement, benefits, company and security. Women overall, rated the type of work as clearly more important than any of the other factors and benefits as the least important. Interestingly, when applicants were asked what factors they thought were important to other people, both male and female applicants listed pay as the most important factor and co-workers as the least important.

## **CHECKING WITH REFEREES**

Muchinsky (1979) states that "most of the available evidence on referee reports suggests that they are not particularly valuable as selection devices, although some notable exceptions have been reported" (p 287). References may also be subject to leniency errors (Smith & Robertson, 1989).

The practice of reference checking is based on the premise that past performance is a valid predictor of future performance (Rudman, 1991).

References can be used to confirm information given by the applicant and/or to gain information on previous work performance or personal characteristics (Smith et al, 1993).

In many cases, the applicant will recommend a number of referees that may be contacted. The employer needs to determine if the referee has sufficient knowledge and experience of the applicant to make a true judgement of their abilities and suitability to the role. Guion (1989) believes that the usefulness of telephone reference checks can be improved by applying them in the same way as structured interviews. Questions should be planned in advance and written out prior to contacting the referee. As with interviewing, questions need to be specific and based around key competencies or behaviours required for the position. The content should closely resemble the interview design and the same basic areas should be covered (Beatty, 1994). If certain skills have been weighted as more critical to the job, these should be focused on in the referee check. As with the interview, building rapport and establishing trust are important for telephone referee checking (Smart, 1983). Some believe (e.g. Fear et al, 1990) that it is preferable to carry out referee checking prior to the final interview, to provide the opportunity to follow up, in the interview, any discrepancy between the information given on the application form and that given by the referee. They concede that this timing is often not practicable.

The information from referees who are contacted late in the process, is likely to be used as a last minute check on the suitability of an applicant or to confirm

self-report or interview information (Taylor et al, 1993). It is not usually used as part of the decision to employ (Smith et al, 1993).

## **STAGE FOUR - PLACEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT FOLLOW-UP**

Once appointed, an applicant needs to be inducted into the organisation, trained and developed (as appropriate) and their performance standards agreed and assessed (Boxall et al, 1987). Career planning, occupational health and safety issues, job design, equal employment opportunities, compensation, quality of working life, productivity and union involvement may all be factors which have the potential to affect the applicant's level of satisfaction both with the job and the organisation.

Appointees enter an organisation with their own expectations of the new environment and their role within it (Major, Kozlowski, Chao & Gardner, 1995). The more the appointee's expectations and organisational reality are aligned, the easier the appointee's transition from being an outsider to an insider (Wanous, 1992). Unmet expectations can influence an appointee's adjustment in terms of job satisfaction and commitment and may result in absenteeism, intention to quit and turnover (Wanous, 1992).

The supervisor has a major role to play in the successful socialisation of a new appointee and a good relationship between supervisor and appointee may mitigate some of the negative effects of unmet expectations (Major et al, 1995).

The link between turnover and satisfaction may not be as strong as it would first appear, as leaving the organisation is only one option that an employee may take if they are dissatisfied. The rate of unemployment also influences employee turnover and if the employee perceives that they will have difficulty obtaining another job, then they are more likely to stay in the organisation, even if they are dissatisfied (Landy, 1989), however, the more dissatisfied they are, the more likely they will look at other employment options (Hellman, 1997).

Employees may leave an organisation for a myriad of different reasons, both positive and negative. The aim of exit interviews is to explore these reasons. The quality of the information gained is often dependent upon the attitude of the employee and the reasons behind their departure (Rae, 1988). Reoccurring trends that are identified may alert organisations to areas that might warrant investigation.

## **SUMMARY**

Following a structured path through the four stages of recruitment and selection, from defining the job to socialisation of the new appointee, will enhance the chances of gaining a good fit between the organisation and the individual. Fit has traditionally been defined as matching the applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities to the job requirements, but it also includes matching the applicant's values, beliefs and personality to the values, beliefs and norms of the organisation (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Fit has been found to be positively

correlated with job satisfaction, commitment, job involvement, and organisational effectiveness and turnover.

Various authors (e.g. Breaugh, 1997; Plumbley, 1985) have suggested that utilising an integrated stage model throughout the recruitment and selection process can improve results. The present research aims to examine actual procedures in a New Zealand organisation across the different stages of this model.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY



### PART A – THEORY

#### i) TRIANGULATED RESEARCH

This study used a triangulated research strategy utilising a number of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Denzin (1978) defined triangulation as a strategy “employing multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical events” (p13). Triangulation is a term that is derived from navigation and military strategies that utilise multiple reference points to locate an object’s exact position. The underlying premise is that multiple techniques allow for both greater accuracy and a more complex understanding of the phenomena being investigated. In an organisational setting, researchers can raise the accuracy of their information by gathering different sorts of data on the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979). Denzin (1978) proposed that utilising several techniques each with its own strengths and weaknesses maximises the strengths of different techniques whilst minimising their weaknesses. This is largely attributed to each technique having its own unique biases and errors that are dissimilar to the errors and biases of other techniques, so the errors do not compound with one another. “No single method will ever permit an investigator to develop causal propositions free of rival interpretations” and “because each method reveals

different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observation must be employed” (p25). Triangulation is useful not just for looking at the same phenomenon from multiple viewpoints and for enhancing our understanding, but also for allowing new dimensions to come forth (Jick, 1979).

The techniques utilised in this study were chosen because they enabled the subject to be examined in breadth and depth and they also allowed for cross-verification of the validity and reliability of the information. Breaugh (1992) states that in order to look at how applicants and recruiters make decisions, greater use needs to be made of diaries, interviews and other data gathering techniques. In the present study, survey results and in-depth interviews revealed a variety of perceptions. The data gathered from vacancy schedules and computer reports complemented the other information that was gathered. Table 3 describes the strengths and weaknesses of the techniques utilised in this study.

**TABLE 3: INFORMATION GATHERING TECHNIQUES**

AIM	TECHNIQUE	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS
To obtain a statistical basis for analysis, and to assess if documentation supports or differs from recruiters' or applicants' perceptions of events.	Content analysis.	Factual, numerical, capable of being moulded and presented in a readily recognisable and comparable format e.g. tables and percentages.	Does not reflect peoples' perceptions of, and reactions to, the processes.
To gain an overall picture of recruitment and selection practices from both perspectives.	Questionnaire surveys.	Able to reach all recruiters and all successful applicants; low cost; choice of anonymous response. Results allow for themes to be developed and explored further in subsequent interviews.	Particular issues can not be covered in depth, hence some issues are covered only superficially or not at all. Gives breadth not depth of information.
To collect data on recruiters' and applicants' knowledge and perceptions. To probe issues.	In-depth interviews.	Allows in-depth exploration of particular issues, enables exploration of feelings, thoughts and perceptions.	As it is a time consuming technique, it does not allow for large numbers of individuals to be interviewed (and hence information from interviewees may not be representative of all subjects). Gives depth to, not breadth of, information.

## **Strengths and limitations of triangulation**

Triangulation, like any other research strategy, is not a panacea for the problems of research design (Handy, 1997). Used thoughtfully, it can enhance the data collection process. Used carelessly, it may simply compound errors whilst adding little new information.

The main strengths of triangulation are that it allows for the analysis of complex organisational issues and it increases reliability, validity, depth and understanding by providing multiple perspectives on the issue under study. The researcher can combine multiple data sources, research methods, theoretical perspectives and observers. In the words of Jick (1979), the researcher becomes a "builder and creator, piecing together many pieces of a complex puzzle into a coherent whole" (p608). The researcher uses whichever and however many techniques s/he needs to understand the issues or process under study (Denzin, 1989). For example, in the present study it was important both to gain breadth of knowledge concerning recruitment practices across the organisation and to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of, and reactions to, the recruitment and selection process. To do this, the techniques of a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews were utilised.

As stated, triangulation is not a miraculous answer to the problems of bias or error in research (Handy, 1997). It has been suggested that triangulation may not increase validity and or lessen bias, for it cannot be assumed that one

technique's biases are dissimilar to those of other techniques. This is a problem if techniques are chosen just to add to the quantity of information gathered. Techniques need to be carefully chosen to compliment each other by capitalising on their respective strengths and rationalising their weaknesses and because they enhance our understanding of the topic under study. If techniques are not carefully chosen, whilst a more detailed picture may be gained, it may still contain biases. Additionally, different techniques may lead to different and possibly contradictory results, which raises the dilemma of which results will be chosen over the other ones (Flick, 1992). Recent writers on triangulation have suggested that instead of promoting triangulation as a strategy of validation, it should be used to illuminate different facets of the research problem and add depth and breadth to the analysis (Flick, 1992).

In conclusion, there are a number of limitations that are associated with a triangulated research strategy. Firstly, replication of the results can be extremely difficult when multiple techniques are used, particularly so when qualitative techniques are utilised. Secondly, triangulation does not help when a poor research design has been employed - if the wrong question is asked then no amount of different techniques, or energy expended, will result in the right answer. Lastly, one technique should not be chosen purely because it can legitimise another technique. Each technique should be chosen because it sheds light on the issue under study and should stand on its own merits and not chosen

solely to support a more dominant method. If one method is stronger or more suitable to the nature of the issue under study, this should be justified in the write-up and made explicit (Jick, 1979).

ii) **GROUNDED THEORY**

“A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p23). Rather than beginning with a theory and then gathering data which proves or disproves the theory, grounded theory begins with the issue under study and through careful data analysis, the theory is developed and verified (Corbin et al, 1990). It is a qualitative analysis that includes the theoretical sampling of different groups and the constant comparisons of data with emerging categories (Creswell, 1994; Strauss, 1987). Many events or actions are analysed, compared to others and then coded (Corbin et al, 1990). The aim of this method is to throw light on the phenomenon or issue under study and reflect the variations that comprise the phenomenon (Corbin et al, 1990). In the present research, grounded theory was chosen to describe the recruitment and selection situation in the Ministry.

## **PART B - THE PRESENT RESEARCH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ministry employed approximately 1,000 people at the time this research was carried out. It was comprised of nine separate and diverse operating divisions. Whilst there were offices of various operating parts of the Ministry located in the major metropolitan centres, most staff were located in the head office in Wellington. In the same year that this research was carried out the Ministry gained a large division from another government department. This new division swelled the Ministry's numbers from approximately 650 to 1,000. The new division came with its own policy and procedure history, which in terms of recruitment and selection policies was very different to the Ministry's. The new division was much more structured in its approach and the comments and information from recruiters and successful applicants in this division have added to the diversity of the information gained, which may have been more homogeneous in nature had this division not joined when it did.

This research was carried out from within the Ministry. At the time of this study, I was employed as a Senior Advisor in the Human Resources Group. Holding this position may have influenced the quality and amount of information gained as I had already established a working rapport with many of the participants. It may also have influenced the response rate of the questionnaires, as recipients may

have felt they were professionally obliged to complete it and return it. I believe the influence of being an insider was a positive one, which aided in raising the quality and quantity of the information gained. One negative effect may have been that individuals may not have wanted to mention something detrimental to the Ministry or to specific individuals as they may have felt that as an insider, I may not have been entirely objective or may have reported comments to Ministry management. I was not aware of this happening and went through a confidentiality statement with each participant, but it may have been an influence none the less.

## **THE RESPONDENTS**

### **i) Recruiters (N= 120)**

In late 1996/early 1997, all divisions within the Ministry were asked to provide the names of all of the individuals within their division who had been involved in recruitment and selection decisions in the previous calendar year (January to December 1996). A total of 136 names were supplied. By the time the questionnaire was ready to be sent out, 16 of the 136 people had either resigned or their positions had been disestablished. As a consequence, the final sample size was reduced to 120. Seventy-nine percent of the sample came from the greater Wellington region, the remainder (21%) from other regional offices - Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Dunedin.

## **ii) Successful applicants (N= 81)**

The names of successful applicants appointed during 1996 were gathered using the Ministry's Human Resources Information System. Applicants were sorted into two categories - those who were still employed by the Ministry and those who were not. The eighty-three (83) successful applicants who were still employed by the Ministry formed the sample. Of the 83 individuals who made up the sample, two resigned in the period between identifying the names and starting the empirical research. The sample was therefore reduced to a total of 81 individuals. Seventy-five percent of the sample were from the greater Wellington region, the remainder from other regional offices – Auckland, Hamilton, Wairakei, Napier, Nelson and Christchurch.

It is acknowledged that this sample may be biased as it contained only applicants who were successful in obtaining a position. Being successful may have coloured the applicants' retrospective recollection of the selection process. It was originally intended to seek information from unsuccessful applicants to give a more balanced picture of applicants' perceptions of the selection process. However, unsuccessful applicants could not be contacted as this would have contravened the Privacy Act. The Privacy Act (1993) states that personal information is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it is given and is to be destroyed once that purpose has been achieved or the reason for it being supplied has passed. In this instance, names and addresses were

supplied by applicants only in application for a particular vacancy (and not to be used as part of a research project at a later date).

### **iii) Former employees (N= 37)**

Successful applicants who were appointed in 1996, who subsequently left the Ministry formed another sample totalling 46 individuals. The list of names was initially analysed to discern the reason for an individual's departure from the Ministry i.e. resignation, redundancy or death. Of the 46, 3 were temporary appointments, 5 were redundancies and 1 deceased. The sample was reduced to those who had been appointed to the permanent staff in 1996 and who had subsequently voluntarily left the Ministry i.e. those who had resigned. This sample totalled 37.

## **TECHNIQUES**

The techniques chosen for this study were:

- Questionnaires
  - to recruiters
  - to successful applicants
- In-depth interviews
  - with a sub-set of recruiters
  - with a sub-set of successful applicants

- Content Analysis
  - of vacancy schedules
  - of computerised reports and other selection documentation
  - of exit interview files

## **A) THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

### **i) To all recruiters (N= 120)**

The questionnaire (Appendix I) was designed to obtain information in response to nine main question areas regarding the Ministry's selection procedures:

- (a) what type, and what number, of selection decisions are made in a given year?
- (b) who is involved in the selection process?
- (c) how much information is given to applicants and when is it given?
- (d) what recruitment sources and recruitment methods are utilised?
- (e) how (and according to what criteria) are applicants short-listed?
- (f) what selection methods are used?
- (g) what is the perceived value of various selection methods?
- (h) what procedures are used for note taking, recommending appointment and calling referees?
- (i) how might the selection process be improved?

The questionnaire was also designed to provide an assessment of the individual's knowledge of various selection methods.

An initial list of areas to be targeted and questions to be asked was compiled in late 1996. These questions formed the basis for the first draft of the questionnaire. The form was then altered and adapted based on a recruitment and selection questionnaire developed by David Bartram in the U.K. in 1991 (obtained from Bartram, University of Hull). Bartram's questionnaire was designed to elicit information on recruitment and selection practices with particular emphasis on the recruitment and selection of young people by small businesses in the U.K. The question areas in Bartram's questionnaire were of a generic nature and able to be moulded and translated into a recruitment and selection questionnaire which suited the practices of a government ministry in New Zealand. Whilst the questionnaires used in the present research are not identical to Bartram's questionnaire, his questionnaire provided the framework around which the present questionnaires were developed.

Nominations were called for from divisions to represent them on a cross-divisional project team. Names were received and a project team was established. The role of the project team was to vet the questionnaire before its final release and to act as divisional contact points. The final questionnaire was released on 1 July 1997.

The questionnaire was divided into Part A and Part B. Part A focused on information about the individual filling in the form i.e. the recruiter, and Part B focused on selection methods and procedures. There were five job types

identified within the Ministry - policy staff; administrative/support staff; technical staff; specialist/business support staff and senior managers (referred to in the questionnaire as “third tier managers and above”). To enable the information to be compared across job types, there was a different Part B to be completed for each of the five job types identified. One Part A and five Part Bs were distributed to each individual, as well as an individually addressed covering letter (Appendix Ia) setting out the background to the questionnaire and instructions for filling it in. Respondents were also advised to return any Part B's that they did not require.

A week and a half was allowed for completion of the questionnaire and those not responding within this time-frame were sent an individual follow-up reminder by way of an e-mail message.

#### Responses to the questionnaire to recruiters

A total of 112 useable returns were obtained from 97 respondents (those who had recruited for more than one position filled out more than one questionnaire). This represents 71% of the original identified sample to whom the questionnaire was sent and 81% of those who were still in the employ of the Ministry at the time the questionnaire was distributed. The response rate across the nine divisions varied from 62% to 100%.

## **ii) To all successful applicants (N= 81)**

Key themes were identified from the questionnaire to recruiters, which were then translated to form the basis of the questionnaire for applicants (Appendix II). Key themes were matched between questionnaires so that responses could be compared and contrasted between the questionnaires, on the main issues. Key themes which complimented the themes from the original questionnaire were:

- (a) was the information regarding the job and Ministry, sufficient from the applicant's perspective?
- (b) was the information accurate and timely?
- (c) what is the perceived value of various information gathering techniques and selection methods?
- (d) how might the selection process be improved?

Additional dimensions were added by the inclusion of questions on what motivated the applicant to accept the job, was the panel influential in the applicant's decision to accept the job and did the job turn out to be as it was portrayed in the interview?

The questionnaire was trialled on several individuals for content clarity, which resulted in a shorter, more compact questionnaire. After final amendments had been made, the questionnaires were photocopied and an individually addressed letter (Appendix IIa) was attached to the front of each questionnaire. This letter explained the purpose of the questionnaire and what the information would be

used for. It also explained that the individual results would be confidential and any identifying features would be removed from the final report. The questionnaires could be returned either with the covering letter attached so that the respondent was identifiable or with the covering letter detached. The questionnaire was distributed through the internal mail system and a reminder was sent out by e-mail, three weeks afterward to encourage more responses.

#### Responses to the questionnaire to successful applicants

A total of 53 useable questionnaire responses were returned. This represents 67% of the sample to whom the questionnaire was sent (excluding the 2 who had resigned). Responses across the nine divisions ranged from 50% to 100%.

### **B) IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

In-depth interviews were carried out with approximately one-seventh (n=16) of recruiters (which equates to one-ninth of the original sample) and just over one-sixth (n=10) of successful applicants (which equates to one-ninth of the original sample).

A set of structured interview questions was developed, in both cases, to form the basis of issues to be explored during the discussion.

### **i) With recruiters (N= 16)**

The names of recruiters to interview were initially chosen at random. Names were then checked to ensure adequate representation from each division. Where one division was underrepresented, more names were chosen at random from that division which then replaced names from the divisions which were over-represented. In this way, the number of divisional in-depth interviews was proportional to the number of divisional responses to the recruiters' questionnaire.

#### Development of the interview schedule

A structured set of interview questions (Appendix III) was developed to allow for answers to be compared and contrasted on similar issues. Each participant was asked the same questions. The order of the questions differed slightly in some interviews, depending upon the information that was obtained in response to the previous question asked. Some flexibility was allowed so that some issues could be probed further or new issues explored. The structured interviews took about 45 minutes each to complete, however with probing, some lasted up to an hour.

The questions were initially designed to expand upon information given in the questionnaires. The presence of an interviewer allowed participants to clarify points and to expand on earlier questionnaire responses of "yes", "no" or "have no knowledge". To this base, additional questions were added to give more

depth to the information on recruitment and selection practices. After the initial greeting and statement regarding confidentiality, the interview began with some general questions to break the ice and then moved into some more specific ones. The key interview themes were:

- (a) what processes do you go through when a vacancy occurs?
- (b) what information do you give the applicant and when do you give it?
- (c) describe the interview format
- (d) how do you prepare for the interview?
- (e) an exploration of other selection methods
- (f) when are reference checks carried out and who is contacted?
- (g) what are the relative weightings of various selection methods?
- (h) an exploration of selection panel dynamics and power differentials
- (i) was the appointed person successful in the job?
- (j) what could have been done to improve the applicant/job fit?

## **ii) With successful applicants (N= 10)**

The names of successful applicants were chosen to correspond with the names of selection panel members who had participated in an in-depth interview. In this way, vacancies were matched for a panel member and for the successful applicant. Matching ensured that the two points of view regarding the one selection process could be compared and contrasted and also ensured the proportion of divisional representation.

### Development of the interview schedule

A structured set of interview questions (Appendix IV) was developed to allow for answers to be compared and contrasted on similar issues. Some flexibility was allowed so that some issues could be probed further or new issues pursued. The structured interview questions took about 30 minutes to complete, however with probing, sessions lasted up to 45 minutes.

The key interview themes were:

- (a) were you given sufficient information about the Ministry and the position?
- (b) what was your perception of the selection process and the interview in particular?
- (c) an exploration of other selection methods
- (d) did the job turn out as it was portrayed in the interview?
- (e) what could have been done to improve the selection process?

### **Procedures and format for in-depth interviews**

The procedures and format were the same for both sets of interviews. Participants were initially contacted by telephone and asked if they would participate in this research. If agreeable, an interview time was arranged. Each person who was contacted agreed to be interviewed. An individual office was used for interviews. At the beginning of each session, participants were told a bit more about the background of the research and were told that the information they gave would be confidential and would form part of a report in which

individuals (and their divisions) would not be identifiable. Any questions about the research were answered at this stage. Participants were asked for their permission for the interview to be audiotaped. All, except one, agreed to be taped. In addition, responses from all participants were written on the structured question forms, on which space was provided. There was time at the end of each interview to discuss any other issues particularly with regard to improving the recruitment and selection process.

## **C) CONTENT ANALYSES OF SELECTION DOCUMENTATION**

### **i) Vacancy schedules**

One vacancy schedule existed for each vacancy that was advertised. Information analysed included the advertisement, job description, person specification, interview questions, composition of panel, format of the interview, other selection methods if used, the recommendation for appointment and referee notes. The information in these documents provided a framework of information on the process for each vacancy.

### **ii) Computerised reports**

Specific recruitment information from the Human Resources Information System (CHRIS) was analysed. Reports were produced to determine several key things:

- (a) what were the most common recruitment sources and methods used by recruiters?

- (b) where (i.e. through what source) did short-listed and successful applicants come from?
- (c) how many applicants were there for each vacancy?
- (d) did some vacancy numbers cover more than one position?
- (e) were there vacancies to which no-one was appointed?
- (f) how many people were short-listed for each position?

### **iii) Exit interview files**

A search was carried out to find exit interview information or any other information that might give an insight into why individual successful appointees had resigned from the Ministry, what they thought of their time in the Ministry and if any of the issues raised could be traced back to the recruitment and selection process. A total of 16 exit interviews were obtained which represents 40% of this identified sample (N= 37).

## **ANALYSIS**

Information was originally gathered and analysed by job type. Early in the process it became evident that there were no noticeable differences in practice as a result of recruiting for a particular job type. Information from job types was then amalgamated and results subsequently presented across all job types. In-depth interviews confirmed that recruitment and selection methods within the Ministry are more likely to alter with the level of the job within the organisation rather than with job type.

## **A) The questionnaires**

The questionnaires were analysed item by item. Responses per category were entered onto an excel spreadsheet and percentages were calculated and recorded for each category.

## **B) In-depth interviews**

The interviews were transcribed by the author. The information was then coded into key themes, using a grounded theory approach. Whilst the aim of the questionnaires was to gather a comprehensive, but inevitably somewhat superficial picture of process, the aim of the in-depth interviews was to verify, and add depth to this picture, thus enhancing our understanding of both the process and different individuals' perceptions of it.

## **C) Content Analyses**

### **i) Vacancy schedules**

Initially every schedule was analysed to get an overall indication of the type of information kept on schedules and then a more detailed analysis of randomly selected schedules was carried out. Notes were taken from various types of documentation and the information placed into categories. This information was subsequently compared to the information gained through the questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

## **ii) Computerised human resource information (CHRIS)**

Reports were gathered and the data analysed numerically to provide a basis on which to explore issues further. Average responses per vacancy, identification of recruitment sources, responses per recruitment channel and numbers of applicants interviewed, were four areas that lent themselves particularly well to this type of analysis.

Computerised human resource information was also analysed for anomalies or extraordinary factors. Where these were evident, the vacancy numbers were identified and the vacancy schedules located and analysed to determine why these factors may have occurred e.g. why one advertisement resulted in 97 applications, yet another resulted in only one (1).

Other sources of information were also consulted to throw light on these issues for example, personnel files, the vacancy number record book and other information screens within the CHRIS system.

## **iii) Exit interview files**

The documentation in exit interview files was scanned to determine the primary reasons why individuals in the sample had left the Ministry. Information was sorted into several broad categories e.g. the primary reasons for them leaving, whether they felt that their job description was accurate and what attracted them to the new organisation if this was applicable.

The following results are presented according to the stage model, as set out in the literature review, rather than by technique. I have chosen the stage model as it superimposes a framework on what is a broad and complex subject. This framework serves to organise and clarify the results of a very information rich study, which may otherwise have appeared somewhat disorganised and confusing.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS



### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The information presented in this chapter has been obtained from the two questionnaires, except where it is self-evident that the information has come from official records or unless specified as arising from in-depth interviews.

### BACKGROUND

Although 128 vacancies were listed in 1996, 143 actual positions were available. To most of the vacancies advertised, one person was appointed, although to six of the vacancies there was more than one appointee - the range was two to six appointees, and in some instances the vacancy was cancelled or no appointment was made. This brought the total number of actual appointments to the Ministry, in 1996, to one hundred and twenty-six (126). Forty percent (40%) were internal appointments where the successful applicant was already employed by the Ministry and 60% were external appointments where the successful applicant came from outside the Ministry. All of the outside applicants went through a full selection process, as did most internal applicants, however, some internal applicants did not go through the full process, particularly if they were the only applicant. One example involved a person who was initially

appointed to the temporary staff and later, when the job was advertised and they were the only applicant, the manager felt that they met the criteria and did not think it was necessary to put them through the full selection process. The selection method in this instance was an informal discussion, along with consideration of past performance. Another internal appointment involved an individual who was the only applicant to a position in which they were already performing about 75 % of the duties. In this instance, the method was once again an informal discussion.

There were also a number of temporary appointments made in 1996. These appointments are not a part of this study as in most instances the appointees were only brought in for a short fixed-term job and did not go through the full selection process. There is also very little documentation available on these appointments.

### **Applications for positions**

The Ministry received 1,736 applications for positions in 1996. This is an average of 13 per position, the range from 1 application to 91 applications per position.

The advertisements that produced a large number of applications were for advisor or analyst positions, which were advertised internally and in the newspapers and/or which, listed broad generic skill requirements in the advertisement. For example, one that received 91 applications was for a policy

analyst position, which was advertised nationally in all of the main metropolitan newspapers, as well as being advertised internally. The positions that drew few (1,2 or 3) applications were advertised internally only. In many of these cases, the only applicant was appointed. In-depth interviews revealed that in many of these instances the applicant was already performing in the job, often in an acting role, or had a good knowledge of the job before being appointed to it. Whilst it is policy that all positions are advertised internally, external advertising including the choice of medium and frequency of insertion, is at the manager's discretion.

Of the 1,736 people who applied for positions, 358 applicants were short-listed and subsequently interviewed. The average number of short-listed applicants per position was three (3) and the range, from one (1) applicant to ten (10) applicants per position.

## **THE RECRUITERS AND SELECTORS (N = 112)**

### **Length of time in the Ministry**

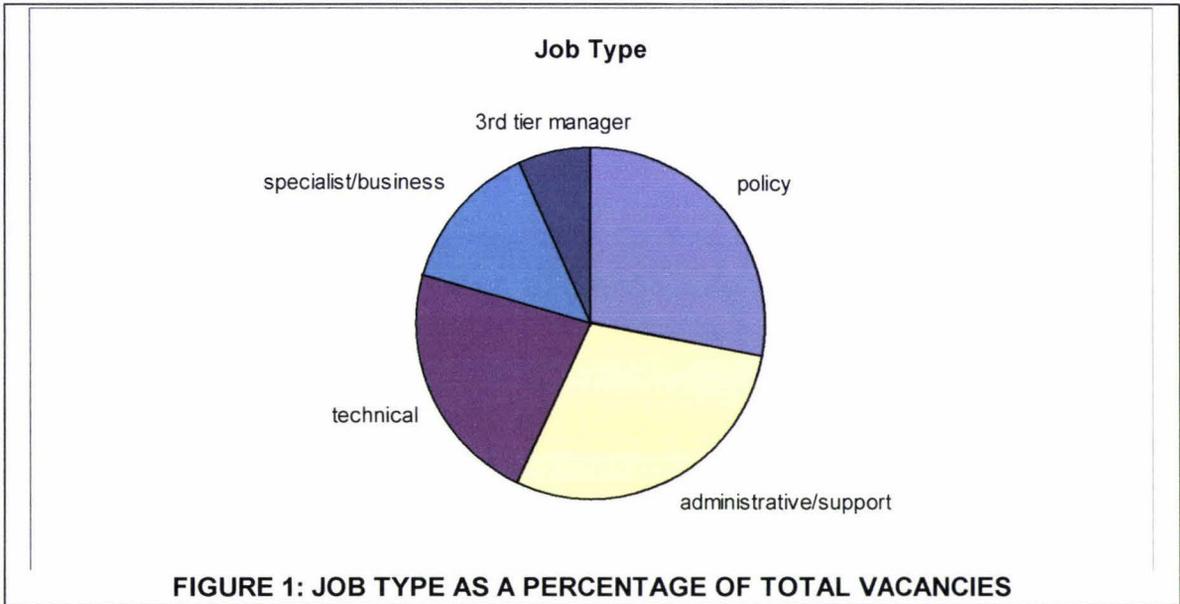
The majority (71%) of managers and staff involved in the recruitment and selection process in the Ministry, have been employed by the Ministry or one of its predecessors for five years or over. The remainder (29%) have been with the Ministry between 1 and 5 years. It appears from the results that the responsibility to recruit staff is positively correlated with job tenure or length of time in the Ministry. Possible explanations may be the assumption that the longer

one has been in the job, the more one knows and therefore is able to pass on to others; because selection is viewed as a responsibility of management as any other managerial responsibility e.g. financial management; or perhaps because the more time one has been in the Ministry the more one will have participated on selection panels and hence be seen as skilled or experienced in this area. Also, the greater the length of time in the Ministry the more one is likely to hold a position of seniority and hence be involved in selection panels.

### **Selection decisions**

The sample of recruiters had been involved in 302 selection decisions in 1996. This does not equate to actual appointments, as often three people were involved in the decision-making for one vacancy.

Of these selection decisions, most were for administrative/support positions (29%), policy positions (28%), or for technical positions (22%). Some were for specialist or business support positions (14%). Few (7%) were for higher level managerial jobs.



Seventy-three (73%) of the sample were involved in selection decisions for positions inside their own division and 27% were involved in decisions for positions outside their own division. Individuals who participated in decisions outside of their own division were often in positions similar to the vacant one, or in support roles and were usually chosen to contribute a broader Ministry perspective.

### **Training received**

The majority of respondents (71%), indicated that they had not received any training in recruitment and selection. The remainder who had received training (29%), had been trained over five years ago. The most common form of training was a short course e.g. one day focused on selection interviewing. Considering the amount of time and money that is invested in recruitment advertising and the

cost when a person does not perform successfully in the job, it is perhaps surprising that so few resources are put into training in recruitment and selection. It could be that to a certain extent recruitment and selection are seen as being common sense and gut reaction i.e. a natural skill. In addition, the costs of making a poor decision are often not readily apparent and can be put down to other factors. However, comments from managers and staff revealed that they would find training in this area useful and they recognised a need for it.

Additionally, in the comments section of the questionnaire that went to successful applicants, several applicants responded that it was apparent that some members of the selection panel had not been trained and that it would be a good idea if interviewers undertook training.

## **STAGE ONE - ASSESSING THE JOB**

### **Process**

A flowchart (Appendix V) which sets out the recommended phases of recruitment and selection procedures is available to guide recruiters. This process was mirrored in the information contained in the vacancy schedules. Discussions with recruiters revealed that this process was largely adhered to in practice, when making appointments. The only differences were in the timing of certain phases or in the choice of selection methods in addition to the interview. For example some selection panels were appointed prior to advertising the job and therefore

the panel were involved in drafting the advertisement and in the early stages of preparation. Other panels were appointed after the job was advertised and the panel was only involved in the later selection and appointment processes.

## **Job Analysis**

The research described in the literature review shows that the first step in the recruitment and selection process, which is that of carrying out a job analysis, is often overlooked. This statement is supported by the present research. Whilst most recruiters ask themselves if the job needs to be filled and update the job description, these activities are often done in a cursory fashion as a quick check before placing the advertisement. None of the recruiters carried out a systematic or comprehensive job analysis. Perhaps the introduction of generic job descriptions lessens the perceived need to carry out a job analysis, as a job analysis would primarily be carried out so that detailed, accurate information could be incorporated into the job description.

Comments from the in-depth interviews with recruiters included:

*"I ask - does the position need to be filled? Has it changed? If it hasn't, I update the job description and decide where to advertise and appoint the panel."*

*"The manager decides – "can we fill the position?" This is often driven by budget considerations. Can the work be divided up amongst existing staff or if its not urgent can it fall off the end of the list? If we go ahead, we review the job description to ensure it's still relevant. Now many job descriptions are generic – they give a reasonable picture of duties and competencies but enable people to move across boundaries."*

*"We ask – does the position need to be filled? Part-time? Full-time? Job-share? We re-write the job description, develop a timeline plan, decide on a panel, the panel approves the advertisement, the panel short-lists separately then agrees."*

## **STAGE TWO - ATTRACTING A FIELD OF CANDIDATES**

### **RECRUITMENT METHODS**

An electronic "Note for Staff" is the most common form of internal vacancy advertisement used by recruiters. This practice is in line with Ministry policy, which states that all vacancies should be advised internally to staff. The second most common form of advertising overall, and the most common form of external advertising, is through the metropolitan newspapers. Specialist newspapers such as "LawTalk" are used occasionally, as is the State Services Circular and networks. Seldom are advertisements placed in Universities or other similar learning institutions. Occasionally management consultants are used. Most of the latter methods are usually used in addition to "Notes for Staff" and newspapers rather than in place of them. In addition to the channels already listed in the questionnaire, the NZ Employment Service was added by several respondents as a place where vacancies were advertised.

**TABLE 4: ADVERTISING MEDIA (N= 112)**

	Never	Sometimes	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<b>Note for Staff (NFS)</b>	1%	6%	88%	5%
<b>Newspapers</b>	2%	32%	62%	4%
<b>Specialist papers e.g. LawTalk</b>	38%	21%	8%	33%
<b>State Sector Circular</b>	24%	27%	13%	36%
<b>Networks</b>	26%	27%	12%	35%
<b>Universities, learning institutions</b>	28%	28%	8%	16%
<b>Personnel management consultants or</b>	35%	23%	11%	31%

## Where recruiters usually advertise

Most recruiters advertise locally, some nationally and only a few, internationally.

**TABLE 5 - WHERE RECRUITERS ADVERTISE (N= 112)**

	Never	Sometimes	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<b>Locally</b>	0	7%	86%	7%
<b>Nationally</b>	0	9%	57%	34%
<b>Overseas</b>	23%	29%	16%	32%

Whilst the questionnaire asked recruiters where they usually advertise, analysis of the vacancy number book and CHRIS reports, showed where advertisements were actually placed in 1996. Only one position was advertised overseas in 1996. This was a position for a “Senior Advisor/Advisor” and was advertised in two Australian papers (the Australian Financial Review and the Canberra Times) in addition to an internal “Note for Staff”. Nineteen positions (15%) were advertised nationally, as well as through a “Note for Staff” and usually in addition to an advertisement in the local paper.

## **Content of advertisements**

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked what information they put into vacancy advertisements. All respondents commented that they use the Ministry format and include some information on the Ministry and the unit that the job is in, however the advertisements vary in terms of the other information that goes into them. Most commented that they include key skills from the job description and several commented that they specifically choose four (4) or five (5) key skills per advertisement.

Two recruiters commented that they try, in the advertisement, to make the job sound interesting. One commented that he tried to make the Ministry stand out from its competitors by *“emphasising challenges e.g. a new section or new position requiring key skills”*. However overall, recruiters do not tend to see the recruitment advertisement as a marketing tool, but rather as a vehicle to convey information to applicants. Perhaps this is why relatively little time is spent on the preparation and content of advertisements.

It has been suggested that advertisements that merely list main points from the job description or person specification may not result in many suitable applications (Rawlinson, 1988; Bucalo, 1983). It is interesting to note that although the Ministry uses this formula for most of its advertisements, it has had little difficulty in attracting adequate numbers of suitable applicants. Perhaps if

the labour market changes, the Ministry will need to review its style of recruitment advertising.

## **RECRUITMENT METHODS AND SOURCES OF APPLICANTS**

Dessler (1988) states that employee referrals may be the best method of obtaining good employees and the success rate of the Ministry's equivalent, "personal contact", supports this statement, as shown in Table 6 below.

Others (e.g. Kaplan et al, 1991) have suggested that newspaper advertisements are the most commonly used method and this was true in the Ministry, also shown in Table 6 below. Newspaper advertising was also the most personally favoured by recruiters.

**TABLE 6: SUPPLY OF APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

	<b>APPLICANTS (TOTAL)</b>	<b>SHORT-LISTED APPLICANTS</b>	<b>SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS</b>
<b>NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT</b>	1005	140	32
<b>INTERNAL ADVERTISEMENT (NFS)</b>	98	58	19
<b>PERSONAL CONTACT</b>	120	50	24
<b>STATE SECTOR CIRCULAR</b>	37	14	4
<b>NZ EMPLOYMENT SERVICE</b>	59	6	0
<b>CONSULTANTS</b>	35	12	4
<b>UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE/S</b>	21	3	3
<b>EEO NETWORKS</b>	10	1	1
<b>OTHER</b>		12	7
<b>NOT LISTED</b>	351	62	26
<b>TOTALS</b>	1736	358	117

Of the 1,736 applications that were received in 1996, the majority (58%) were received in response to newspaper advertisements. Newspaper advertisements

also provided the greatest number (39%) of short-listed applicants i.e. those considered to meet the critical factors for the position. The second largest number of short-listed applicants came from internal advertising.

Newspaper advertising also provided the greatest number of successful applicants (27%). However, when comparing the number of short-listed and successful applicants to the total who applied through that particular method, the highest ratio of successful applicants and short-listed applicants came through personal contact (1:5 and 1:2.4 respectively) and through internal advertising (1:5 and 1:1.7 respectively).

74% of recruiters did not use personnel or management consultants to help to fill their vacancies which may explain the small number of applications obtained through this source as set out in the table above. The 26% who did use consultants, used them mainly to advertise positions and receive applications. Consultants were also used by some recruiters to short-list applications and for referring additional applicants who may not have responded to a newspaper or similar advertisement.

In-depth interviews revealed that for most recruiters the choice of recruitment source is based on where they assume the most suitable applicants are likely to be. This choice is usually, at least initially, broadly defined as internal sources (within the Ministry) or external sources. In making this choice and in choosing between the various external sources, recruiters usually consider what worked

well last time or ask other people what had worked well for them. Monetary costs affect the decision also, as one recruiter commented:

*"Notes for Staff and the New Zealand Employment Service don't cost us anything. If we don't get suitable applicants this way, then we can always use the newspapers".*

Several recruiters commented that if applicants were looking for a job then they would look in their local papers - an example given was that job seekers in Wellington would look at the Evening Post or the Dominion. Local metropolitan papers were seen by most interviewed recruiters as a good source of applicants.

In most cases, the level of position also influenced the choice of recruitment source. Higher level positions were usually advertised, simultaneously, inside and outside of the organisation. Consultants were usually only used for higher level positions or if previous sources had provided few suitable applicants. One recruiter commented that she often advertised support positions in local community newspapers.

# STAGE THREE – ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES

## SHORT-LISTING

### Number involved

For most vacancies, three people were involved in compiling the short-list. At times two people were involved in short-listing. Rarely did only one person carry out the short-listing on their own.

TABLE 7: NUMBERS INVOLVED IN SHORT-LISTING (N=112)

One	Two	Three	More than three
3%	16%	67%	9%

In almost all cases (86%), those involved in the short-listing process were also the members of the interview panel. In-depth interviews revealed two different ways that recruiters undertook short-listing. One was for all those involved to meet together to discuss applicants and agree on a short-list. The other way was for panel members to short-list separately and then come together to discuss and agree on the short-list.

One recruiter explained that he usually received about 45 applications per position advertised. All of his team are involved in short-listing, which they base on critical factors. They usually get the suitable applicants down to about twenty (20) in this first session. Then they all go through them again “*but being more ruthless*”, whilst once again basing their assessment on critical factors. They

usually get down to about ten (10) in this second session. Then the selection panel and all members of the team meet to discuss and debate the final ten. They aim for, and usually get down to, about 5 applicants (the range is usually between two and seven). He has found this method very effective in identifying suitable applicants and also in involving all of the team in the decision-making process.

Another recruiter in a different division commented on a very different short-listing process that she had been involved in that year where the manager (her boss):

*“gets the first run through the applicants and decides he doesn’t want to interview this one, or wants to interview that one. The other panel members have no input”.*

The most common and preferred way of short-listing is for all panel members to short-list separately and then come together, with their choices, to agree on a final list. This was preferred because it allowed for all members to start off on an equal footing in the process, whereas if they decide together, a dominant member’s choices may take precedence over the others.

## **Criteria**

Applicants are usually always short-listed against the criteria set out in the job description and against the person specification. They are also often short-listed against competencies and/or critical factors.

**TABLE 8: CRITERIA USED FOR SHORT-LISTING (N= 112)**

	Never	Sometimes	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<b>Competencies</b>	4%	17%	77%	2%
<b>Critical factors</b>	2%	13%	71%	14%
<b>Job description</b>	1%	7%	88%	4%
<b>Person specification</b>	2%	9%	84%	5%
<b>Other</b>	1%	2%	7%	90%

Under the heading of “Other”, respondents listed:

*“ability to work extended hours/weekends”, “experience for the job”, “references”, “special skill”, “availability”, “intuition”, “qualifications”, “previous experience/employment”, “application presentation, awareness of the position, qualifications and experience”, and “assessment centre performance”.* One respondent, under the heading of competencies described using *“both Ministry competencies and industry specific competencies – the latter generally having more weight”.* In all cases the short-listing factors described under the heading of “Other”, as listed above, were described as being used in addition to the others i.e. competencies, critical factors, job description and person specification, not in place of them.

In-depth interviews with recruiters revealed that while some recruiters used information in the job description to develop short-listing criteria and used this in a semi-scientific way (with matrices or spreadsheets), most recruiters loosely based their short-listing criteria on the job description and, at times, on other information such as the Corporate Plan. Most used a check off (tick) method of assessing applications against critical factors rather than weighting the critical factors or assigning scores or ratings. One used four or five critical factors as the

optimum number, another used eight to ten and yet another had no predetermined optimum number but drew as many as necessary for the job at hand. One recruiter mentioned that usually four to six applicants were shortlisted and he considered this to be an ideal number to choose a successful applicant from.

When asked if the shortlisting criteria was reflected in the vacancy advertisement, typical responses included *“not exactly, but some of them were in there”* and *“no, but they had some points in common”*. Many recruiters commented that there was not a one-to-one correspondence between the factors listed in the advertisement and the short-listing criteria. This may be because, in many cases, short-listing criteria was not developed until after the advertisement was placed and applications received. One recruiter developed critical factors prior to advertising and incorporated these into the advertisement. She also endeavoured to send these factors to applicants so that they could target their application to these critical factors.

## **Record Keeping**

In most cases (83% always; 16% sometimes) records are kept as to why some people made the short-list and others not. Only a small number of the sample (1%) did not keep any records of how short-listing decisions were made. As there is a policy which requires managers to provide specific feedback to internal applicants on why their application was not successful, it is in the managers' best

interests to keep detailed records of how and why they reached the conclusions that they did. This policy was in its infancy when this research was carried out.

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked if many applicants ask for them for feedback if they weren't successful. Just over half replied "no". All responded that they would provide information to the applicant if it was asked of them, although one commented that he would refer the applicant on to the chairperson of the selection panel, rather than give feedback himself.

One commented that comprehensive notes are often not made when there are a large number of applicants and this is a problem if applicants ask for feedback on why they were not short-listed. Most recruiters found it easier to give feedback when they had rated applicants against critical factors. Two commented that they would feel comfortable giving feedback based solely on the applicant's CV or the job description.

## **INFORMATION**

### **Giving information about the Ministry**

Information regarding the Ministry and the vacancy (other than the job description) is usually given to the applicant at interview time. Sometimes information is sent out prior to the interview, although this usually only occurs at the request of the applicant. Most recruiters believe that they give applicants a "realistic job preview" at interview time.

**TABLE 9: GIVING INFORMATION ABOUT THE MINISTRY (N= 112)**

<b>Information (other than J.D.)</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Mostly</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>% who didn't respond to question</b>
<b>Sent prior to Interview</b>	6%	27%	28%	33%	6%
<b>Given at Interview</b>	1%	6%	18%	64%	11%
<b>Realistic job preview</b>	3%	8%	29%	48%	12%

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked for their understanding of the term "realistic job preview" and after agreement on what a realistic job preview looked like, they were asked if they believed they occur in the Ministry. Most recruiters had a general understanding that it referred to "giving the applicant a realistic picture of the job" and to "no surprises". However, responses to the second part of the question varied considerably. Several responded with a definite "yes" and "always", and several with an equally distinct "no". The rest fell in between the two extremes. Responses gave an excellent insight into a recruiter's dilemma with regard to the use of realistic job previews and wanting to attract high calibre applicants.

Interviewer: "Do realistic job previews occur in the Ministry?"

*"Sometimes, but on average not. It's not a deliberate thing, part of human nature – you just don't want to put a good candidate off."*

*"Probably not - tend not to because if you want someone you don't talk about the crappy stuff or the internal politics."*

*“No, “other duties as required” is not explained. Having this on the job description means you can’t say no when requested to do almost anything e.g. serve tea to visitors - applicants aren’t told what is included in this.”*

*“We have detailed job descriptions, which are only good if the job is like the job description. The applicant has the chance to ask questions at the interview, so there shouldn’t be any surprises, but you can’t be certain the applicant has taken the information in.”*

It was evident from the responses given that the onus is on the applicant to ask the right questions rather than on the recruiter to provide detailed information. Job descriptions may be helpful but in many cases they are vague and non-specific. If the applicant doesn’t hit on the right questions to ask, they may end up with an inaccurate picture of the job.

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters commented that they always send out the job description and application form to applicants. Short-listed applicants are subsequently sent information on the composition of the interview panel, the venue for the interview, date and time of the interview and name of the contact person. All recruiters interviewed except one, commented that they don’t, as a rule, send anything additional to applicants, but that applicants can always request more information if they want to. One recruiter commented that *“people often ask for more [information]”*. Applicants can be given the Corporate Plan, a copy of the divisional structure, the Annual Report or *“whatever else is appropriate in response to their request”*.

One recruiter commented that:

*“If an applicant asks for more information, this is seen as a positive thing and a note is made on their application”.*

In this way, requesting more information may form a part of the informal assessment of the applicant (unbeknownst to the applicant).

## Receiving information about the Ministry

The majority of applicants responded that they had been sent information regarding the job and the Ministry prior to their interview and only a small percentage subsequently requested more information. Over half were given more information on the job and the Ministry at the time of their interview and 58% felt that they had been given a realistic job preview (the term was defined in the glossary appended to each questionnaire).

Most respondents felt that they had received sufficient information to construct an effective application and about three-quarters felt that they had received sufficient information to accurately assess the job’s content.

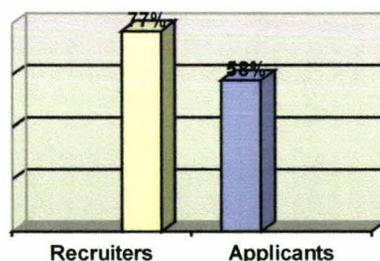
**TABLE 10: INFORMATION ABOUT JOB AND MINISTRY TO APPLICANTS  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

	YES	NO
Were you sent information prior to interview?	71%	29%
Did you request more information?	18%	82%
Was information given at the interview?	58%	38%
Were you given a realistic job preview?	58%	42%
Were you given sufficient information to:		
(i) Construct an effective application?	92%	8%
(ii) Accurately assess the job’s content and its attractiveness (or otherwise) to you?	73%	27%

It is interesting to note the percentage of applicants who did not request more information (82%) and compare this to the information gathered through the in-depth interviews with recruiters. Recruiters perceived that applicants would request more information if they wanted to and that they did not hesitate to do so. As the table above shows, applicants requesting more information is a much rarer occurrence than recruiters perceive it to be. One possible explanation for this, may be that the Ministry's willingness to provide additional information, whilst being apparent to recruiters, is not made clear to applicants.

It is also interesting to note that while 77% of managers felt that they usually give a realistic job preview, only 58% of applicants felt that they had been given one.

Figure 2: Realistic job previews



Furthermore, it became clear from the in-depth interviews that the majority of applicants who felt they had been given a realistic job preview were those who were already in the Ministry or who had prior knowledge of the position. Of the interviewed applicants who felt that they had been given a realistic job preview, 67% had prior/ inside knowledge of the position. The remainder (23%) were from outside the organisation, and had no prior knowledge of the position. All of the

applicants who felt that they had not been given a realistic job preview were from outside the organisation and had no prior knowledge of the position.

## The value of information in terms of timing and content

### (i) The recruiters' perspective

Giving information to the applicant prior to the interview is seen to be of moderate or good value by recruiters, but giving information at the interview is perceived to have slightly more value. Giving applicants a realistic job preview is perceived as having the most value.

**TABLE 11: THE VALUE OF INFORMATION IN TERMS OF TIMING & CONTENT AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

<i>Information</i>	Have no knowledge	Little value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Sent prior to interview</i>	6%	4%	41%	45%	4%
<i>Given at interview</i>	0	3%	28%	55%	14%
<i>Realistic Job Preview</i>	12%	2%	23%	57%	6%

### (ii) The applicants' perspective

In response to a question which asked applicants when they thought it was better to give information about the job and the Ministry to applicants, the majority felt that giving information prior to the interview was of good value and under half felt that giving information at the interview was of good value. The majority of respondents also felt that being given a realistic job preview was of good value.

**TABLE 12: THE VALUE OF INFORMATION IN TERMS OF TIMING AND CONTENT  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

<b>Information</b>	<b>have no knowledge</b>	<b>little or no value</b>	<b>Moderate value</b>	<b>Good value</b>	<b>% who didn't respond to question</b>
<b>Prior to interview</b>	0%	2%	13%	79%	6%
<b>At the interview</b>	2%	15%	42%	40%	1%
<b>A realistic job preview</b>	0%	2%	15%	74%	9%

This table shows a clear preference by applicants for being given information prior to the interview and for being given a realistic job preview.

One of the survey questions asked successful applicants if the job was accurately portrayed in the interview – i.e. did the job turn out as they expected it to? Fifty-eight percent (58%) responded that the job was accurately portrayed in the interview and had turned out as they expected, and 38% responded that it had not. 4% responded that it had turned out as expected and was accurately portrayed, to a point.

Specific comments highlighted the discrepancy between applicant expectations and reality:

*“The job was over-represented - it was portrayed as an active, demanding policy role but it has turned out to be far from this in reality.”*

*“The job didn't turn out as expected and I had had enough after 12 months.” (this person has subsequently left the organisation).*

*“The job was a bit over-glorified. The negative aspects of the job were not highlighted enough.”*

*"The job description was very general - in actuality, once in the job, the range of duties was very narrow and not challenging."*

*"I expected analysis to be the core of the job, rather than day to day administration as it turned out to be."*

*"Discussions with future staff members/colleagues, people who know the "guts" of the job, should be included in the process."*

These comments support the conclusion by Rynes (1993) that applicants' prefer information which is detailed, specific, relevant, and which enables them to differentiate between positions.

Of the successful applicants who were interviewed, the majority responded that they had received sufficient information about the job prior to the interview and that the job had turned out as portrayed in the interview. Three people responded that they received inadequate/misleading information and the job turned out to be very different from the job they expected. Of the three, one has subsequently resigned. A further person responded that although the job did not turn out as expected in the first twelve months, she had subsequently "grown" into the job and there is now a good match.

It is also interesting to compare recruiters' and applicants' responses regarding the value of realistic job previews. Fifty-five percent (55%) of recruiters replied that they were of good value whereas 74% of applicants said they were of good value. There is clearly a difference in perceived value which may account for the

results which showed that whilst 77% of managers felt that they usually gave a realistic job preview, only 58% of applicants felt that they had been given one. If managers are not convinced of their value, they are less likely to put energy into ensuring they are adequately carried out.

Also of note are the differences between the two samples regarding when information is given. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of applicants felt that giving information prior to the interview was of good value, whilst only 45% of recruiters felt this. Fifty-five percent (55%) of recruiters responded that giving information at the interview was of good value, compared to 40% of applicants who felt this.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON APPLICANTS

Curriculum Vitae (CVs), are the most commonly used source for obtaining background information on the applicant, followed by letters of application. Application forms are used some of the time and, to a lesser extent, records of achievement e.g. degree transcripts or certificates of competence.

TABLE 13: SOURCES OF APPLICANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION (N= 112)

	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
Traditional application forms	22%	16%	17%	40%	5%
Curriculum Vitae	0	2%	8%	84%	6%
Letters of application	0	13%	24%	48%	15%
Records of achievement	1%	23%	29%	26%	21%

## The value of different types of background information

### (i) The recruiters' perspective

Using CVs to obtain background information about the applicant is perceived, by recruiters, as having the most value, followed by letters of application. Traditional application forms are perceived to range in terms of their value from little or no value to good value.

**TABLE 14: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<b>Traditional application forms</b>	9%	36%	32%	20%	3%
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	0	1%	31%	68%	0
<b>Letters of application</b>	1%	11%	38%	50%	0
<b>Records of achievement</b>	2%	9%	40%	44%	5%

It is interesting that almost half of the sample thought that records of achievement were of good value and yet they are used infrequently, whilst application forms are seen to only have moderate value and are used more frequently. This may be because Ministry policy requires a standard application form to be attached to each application for a vacancy. The information in the application form is primarily used for statistical and contact purposes - there is little information that would assist the recruiter in determining an applicant's suitability for a job. CVs and letters of application are both viewed as having good value and are used more frequently, particularly CVs.

Comments from recruiters in the in-depth interviews mirrored and enlarged upon their responses regarding background information in the questionnaire e.g. two recruiters commented that they found CVs particularly useful in gaining background information on the applicant. Another recruiter mentioned that records of achievement were not useful at all but that skill checks were.

**(ii) The applicants' perspective**

Opinion was divided on whether traditional application forms provided value in terms of enabling applicants to provide useful information on themselves to the organisation, with 44% reporting moderate value and 35% little or no value.

Opinion was much more cohesive for curriculum vitae, with 100% of the sample of applicants ascribing moderate to good value to them.

**TABLE 15: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
Traditional application form	13%	35%	44%	7%	1%
Curriculum vitae	0	0	26%	74%	0
Letters of application	0	19%	34%	47%	0
Records of achievement	0	9%	53%	36%	2%

Applicants' and recruiters' responses mirror each other in their ratings of different types of background information. They both rated CVs at the top (in terms of value), followed by letters of application and records of achievement. Traditional application forms were rated of least value. These results highlight the

importance and impact of an applicant's CV and letter of application on recruiters. These findings support earlier research, which was described more fully in the literature review, which suggests that recruiters form an impression of the applicant prior to meeting them i.e. through their background information and that these impressions may be a source of bias in the interview. It is as equally important that applicants present themselves well in their written communications as it is in the interview situation, as their written communications may affect the final decision regarding their suitability for the job.

## REFERENCES AND REFEREE CHECKS

Written references are sometimes used to obtain background information on the applicant. More frequently, applicants are asked to provide names of referees who can be contacted by the recruiter. Referees are usually contacted to obtain information on an individual's work-related performance and on their character or personality.

**TABLE 16: REFERENCES AND TYPE OF INFORMATION REQUESTED FROM REFEREES (N=112)**

	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
Letters of reference	2%	35%	38%	17%	8%
Names of referees	1%	7%	46%	45%	1%
Character or personality	2%	19%	29%	47%	3%
Educational attainment	21%	33%	15%	13%	18%
Work-related performance	0	12%	21%	63%	4%

## Perceived value of references and referee checks

### (i) The recruiters' perspective

Greater value is attached to obtaining the names of referees, rather than applicants supplying open, written references. Eighteen percent (18%) of the sample view open written references as having little value.

**TABLE 17: THE VALUE OF TYPE OF REFERENCE  
AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
Letters of reference	1%	18%	46%	33%	2%
Names of referees to contact	1%	2%	25%	68%	4%

### (ii) The applicants' perspective

Over half of the respondents thought that letters of reference were of moderate value, although most respondents thought that supplying the names of referees was of more value.

**TABLE 18: THE VALUE OF TYPE OF REFERENCE  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
Letters of reference	0	21%	62%	6%	11%
Names of referees to contact	0	6%	25%	66%	3%

As described in the literature review, references can be useful for two different purposes. One, to confirm information given by the applicant and two, to gather information on the applicant's previous work performance or personal characteristics. As open, written references do not allow for issues to be probed,

it is unlikely they address either of these purposes adequately. In addition, they are perhaps more prone to leniency errors as they are of a more general nature and are often written without a specific audience in mind. This may, in part, explain why open, written references are seen to have little value.

## Referee checks

Referees are usually telephoned for a verbal reference before final selection decisions are made and they are usually called by the panel chairperson.

TABLE 19: CONTACT WITH REFEREES (N= 112)

	Never	Sometimes	Always	% who didn't respond to question
When – before final selection decision	5%	24%	65%	6%
- after final selection decision	51%	19%	16%	14%
By panel chair	10%	51%	39%	0
By HR	55%	9%	0	36%
Using structured questions	19%	40%	25%	16%
Using unstructured questions	11%	53%	25%	11%
Referees not put forward by applicant	63%	20%	13%	4%

The information from referees is requested using structured questions or unstructured questions. In some cases referees are called whose names were not supplied by the applicant, although this does not happen often.

In the in-depth interviews, two recruiters commented on the importance of referee checks and one commented that it might be useful to talk to the referees of all short-listed applicants prior to interviews and so be *“armed with more*

*information that can be explored in the interview". He usually just carried out a referee check after the interview had taken place, on the most suitable applicant.*

Most recruiters only contact the referees who are listed on the applicant's CV, provided an applicant's current employer or a recent employer is included on the list. Usually two to three referees are telephoned.

*"I call the previous employer if one is listed, or recent employers – generally not character references as they are not good value. I usually phone two or three, no more than three. The managers on the panel usually call for policy positions, the HR/Administrative person for support staff positions."*

*"The people the candidate has listed, but if a recent employer is not listed, then I'll ask if I can contact them."*

The most common response was:

*"Referees put forward by applicant."*

Interviewer: **"Do you ever contact people additional to those put forward by the applicant?"**

*"Never."*

*"No, but I might if I knew them or felt the ones given wouldn't be objective or recent enough."*

*"Only if I check with the applicant first."*

*"No, but it may depend upon the relationship with the person."*

**"Who do you carry them out on/ when do you carry them out?"**

*"I only carry them out on the preferred candidate, and use structured interview"*

*questions.”*

*“After the interview, I carry it out on the preferred candidate, or if there are two or three of them, then I’ll check all of them.”*

*“After the event, as a comfort check on the preferred candidate. I don’t use a structured form.”*

Approximately half of those interviewed commented that they never contact anyone other than those initially put forward by the applicant. Several commented that if they felt the names of the referees, as given by the applicant, would not give them a broad enough picture or if a recent employer was not on the list, then they would ask the applicant for further referees, or ask the applicant if they can contact another individual.

All of the recruiters interviewed had an awareness of the Privacy Act (1993) and this constrained many when carrying out referee checks.

The degree of structure in the referee checks i.e. using structured pre-determined questions based on the requirements for the job, directly affects the quality and usefulness of the information gained (Guion, 1989). Referee checks in the Ministry range from unstructured e.g. “What did you think of Joe Bloggs?” to fairly structured i.e. having set questions. The value of the information gained from referee checks, therefore, is not consistent and is questionable in terms of its relative worth in the overall selection decision.

# INTERVIEWS

## Preparation for the interview

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked what they do before they meet with the applicant:

*"We allocate questions a day or so beforehand and about 15 minutes beforehand we set up the room, get a jug of water, a pot plant, set up the OHP if they're giving a presentation and give the names to reception."*

*"Not much time is spent preparing before the candidate arrives – the chairperson decides the format of the interview, the questions and who will ask what."*

*"The panel meet about 15 minutes before the applicant arrives, agree on who will ask what question, sometimes the panel sets questions, sometimes not - sometimes corporate or HR will."*

From the responses given, approximately 15 minutes seems to be the usual amount of time spent in preparation prior to an applicant arriving, although one recruiter set aside longer:

*"I usually set aside one hour for the panel to meet beforehand to organise and agree on questions and the structure of the interview, although what often happened was we met half an hour before the interview."*

Although on the surface, it would appear from these comments that only a small amount of time is spent in preparation for the interview, it can not be assumed that this is the only preparation time prior to interviewing. Interview questions are typically formulated prior to the interviews. The time immediately preceding the

interview is usually used to sort out last minute details and to determine any changes. Interviews are not quite so “off-the-cuff” as the above comments might suggest.

However, these comments do illustrate some of the dynamics of panel interviewing. At times the panel acted as a team to develop and allocate questions and to agree on a format for the interview, in other situations the chairperson managed and directed the process, with other panel members being assigned their questions and told of the interview’s format. Panel members did not have a clear preference for one over the other and felt that if the chairperson was more familiar with the job then it was not inappropriate for them to take a lead in both the interview preparation and in the interview itself, although some panel members expressed a preference for being involved in generating the interview questions, rather than just being assigned them.

## **Type of interview/ interview format**

### **(i) The recruiters’ perspective**

The most commonly used interview format is a semi-structured interview where the interview has some structure in terms of set questions, but where the format can be deviated from when particular points of interest arise. A structured format, where the interview is conducted using a pre-determined, agreed set of questions which are adhered to, is the second most commonly used interview format, followed by situational interviews where the applicant is asked to explain what

they would do in specific hypothetical situations. The most infrequently used format is the unstructured interview, where the interview progresses mainly as an unplanned discussion (i.e. there is no standardised format).

**TABLE 20: INTERVIEW FORMAT (N= 112)**

<i>Interview format</i>	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Unstructured</i>	64%	4%	5%	1%	26%
<i>Semi-structured</i>	9%	22%	21%	34%	14%
<i>Structured</i>	21%	15%	14%	25%	25%
<i>Situational</i>	21%	19%	20%	15%	25%

### The value of different interview formats

Semi-structured interviews are perceived, by recruiters, as having the most value and unstructured interviews the least value.

**TABLE 21: THE VALUE OF INTERVIEW FORMAT AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

<i>Interview format</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Unstructured</i>	22%	46%	16%	2%	14%
<i>Semi-structured</i>	4%	4%	27%	55%	10%
<i>Structured</i>	9%	13%	32%	37%	9%
<i>Situational</i>	19%	6%	23%	41%	11%

These results, in terms of overall value, mirror the actual use of interview format i.e. a semi-structured interview is both the most commonly used format and it is perceived as having the most value. As there is not an organisational policy that dictates the type of interview format that is to be used, apart from asking the same questions of each applicants and asking open questions, it makes sense that recruiters use a format that they believe will give them quality information.

All recruiters who were interviewed commented that they used a predetermined set of questions in the interviews, however some allowed for probing and others didn't. For example, one recruiter never deviated from the set questions and as a consequence, his interviews rarely ran over their allotted 45 minutes, whilst another used set questions but would deviate from these - his interviews usually lasted between 45 minutes and 60 minutes, some longer.

*"We have structured questions and spend about 40 minutes of a 45-minute interview learning about the applicant and 5 minutes describing the job. The applicant can ask questions at the end. We ask questions which cover the more mundane tasks and don't feel we have to sell the job as such. You expect an applicant with experience to have knowledge of the good and bad points already."*

*"We have a structured format. First of all we start with small talk to calm the applicant, and then explain the format of the interview. Then we go into the interview questions, which are always pre-determined. We use open, probing questions that may vary and probe topic by topic, not a funnel effect. We close with the opportunity for applicants to ask questions and sometimes give applicants a tour of the place."*

*"We have a series of questions, with prior agreement on who asks what. We don't go off on tangents or deviate from questions, but this should perhaps be factored in."*

When asked how long their interviews usually last, most recruiters responded that 45 minutes to an hour was usual practice. They were also asked how much time is spent learning about the applicant compared with the time spent describing the job i.e. how much time the recruiter talks compared to how much time the applicant talks. Comments included:

*"If it's a poor candidate, the interview only lasts 10 to 15 minutes – for example, if they don't live up to their CV, have poor communication skills or just give yes/no answers. Otherwise, 30 to 40 minutes. About 5% of time is spent describing the position and most of the interview is spent learning about the applicant."*

*"45 minutes. The interviewer talks for about 25% of the time - occasionally up to 50% depending upon the interviewer and some interviewers always take up 80% of the time! Usually 50% is spent learning about the applicant, although I'm not sure how much is actually learnt about the applicant in this way, though."*

*"Usually 45 minutes, but I allow up to an hour. There is 5 minutes talking up front and question time at the end. Most of the time is spent learning about the applicant."*

*"45 to 60 minutes - a few longer. Only 1 to 2 minutes is spent up front describing the job. It is assumed the applicant knows of the position and they can always ask questions at the end. About 10 minutes for "tell us about yourself", outside of answering the questions".*

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked if they had always used the same interview format. Most responded that they had always used the same format for all positions. When asked how effective they had found this format, they commented:

*"A lot of time is spent meandering around, its not as structured as it could be, a bit higgledy-piggledy – doesn't stick to question order."*

*"It's good when you've worked out your questions, along with the positive and negative qualities you're looking for beforehand."*

One recruiter commented that he wasn't sure if it was effective, for:

*“although you can compare across question responses, often information is missing – it’s the questions you don’t ask that give you problems later on”.*

## **(ii) The applicants’ perspective**

In the in-depth interviews, applicants were asked about the format of the interview they attended. All applicants described a semi-structured interview format which was used in all instances. The panel had set questions which they took “turns” to ask. Additional questions were asked by panel members as appropriate.

*“There were set questions, however these weren’t rigidly stuck to if a discussion progressed.”*

*“I would say it was a semi-structured process – a combination of set questions and a casual discussion.”*

*“Set questions, structured but informal.”*

One interviewee described an interview which differed from the others in terms of format. This person applied for a position which reported to a senior executive, in a support role. She had one quick interview with a person from Human Resources section in which structured questions were used and then came back for a “1/2 hour chat with the boss”. She commented that the *“process could have been improved, by using a panel interview for example”*. She found the process she experienced to be too informal and unstructured.

## The value of different interview formats

Semi-structured interviews are perceived, by applicants, as having the most value with unstructured interviews perceived as having the least value.

TABLE 22: THE VALUE OF THE INTERVIEW FORMAT  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)

<i>Interview format</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Unstructured</i>	6%	55%	30%	9%	0
<i>Semi-structured</i>	0	2%	38%	60%	0
<i>Structured</i>	2%	24%	51%	23%	0
<i>Situational</i>	0	16%	26%	58%	0

It is interesting to note that both recruiters and applicants attribute greatest value, in terms of information gained, to semi-structured interviews and the least value to unstructured interviews. This is explored further in the Discussion chapter.

There appears to be a mis-match between the amount of time spent in preparation before the interview (which is quite minimal) by recruiters, and the reported use of structured and semi-structured interviews. Discussions with both recruiters and applicants revealed that an interview was considered structured or semi-structured if set questions were asked and if there was an evident interview format (i.e. the questions followed in a logical sequence). If a degree of free discussion took place, the interview was considered to be semi-structured, rather than structured. This broad use of the terms structured and semi-structured could account for the apparent discrepancy between preparation time and reported structure in the interview format.

## Interview procedures

Almost three-quarters of recruiters always rate applicants against critical factors in the interview. Only 2% of respondents indicated that they never rate applicants against critical factors.

Notes are always taken against set questions in 83% of instances, and sometimes taken, in 10% of instances. Notes are usually either taken by a note-taker or by all members of the panel.

TABLE 23: NOTE-TAKING IN THE INTERVIEW (N=112)

	Never	Sometimes	Always	% who didn't respond to question
Rated against critical factors	2%	24%	72%	2%
Notes taken against set questions	0	10%	83%	7%
- by all interviewers	2%	12%	54%	N/A
- by a note-taker	8%	23%	54%	N/A

## Number of interviews/ interviewers

### The recruiters' perspective

There is usually only one interview carried out per applicant. At times applicants returned for a subsequent interview, although this was not usual practice.

TABLE 24: THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS PER APPLICANT (N= 112)

Number of interviews	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
One	1%	4%	37%	47%	11%
More than one	24%	48%	11%	7%	10%

The majority of interviews are conducted using three people on the interview panel and only very rarely does one person interview on his or her own.

**TABLE 25: THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ON THE INTERVIEW PANEL (N=112)**

<i>Number of interviewers</i>	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<i>One</i>	62%	4%	1%	1%	32%
<i>Two</i>	39%	25%	3%	3%	30%
<i>Three</i>	5%	12%	29%	46%	8%
<i>More than three</i>	28%	30%	8%	7%	27%

### Perceived value

The results show a preference, in terms of perceived value, for one interview only.

**TABLE 26: THE VALUE OF THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS PER APPLICANT AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

<i>Number of interviews</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>One</i>	1%	3%	28%	62%	6%
<i>More than one</i>	12%	5%	39%	34%	10%

In the in-depth interviews, several recruiters expressed surprise at the suggestion of bringing applicants in for a second or subsequent interview, and the questionnaire results revealed that 12% of recruiters had no knowledge of more than one interview. Many felt that they should be able to make up their minds after the first interview. Striving to learn enough relevant details about an applicant's suitability and background to make a selection decision, in the space of a 45 minute interview is a difficult task, particularly so when so many other factors, as outlined the literature review, come into play. Perhaps it is small wonder that so much emphasis is placed on the information in an applicant's CV and letter of application and that the interview is often used mainly to confirm, or disconfirm, previous evaluations.

A three-person panel is regarded by recruiters as providing the best value. One interviewer was viewed as having the least value of the four options.

**TABLE 27: THE VALUE OF THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWERS AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

<i>Number of interviews</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>One</i>	22%	30%	25%	8%	15%
<i>Two</i>	13%	8%	42%	20%	17%
<i>Three</i>	3%	7%	17%	63%	10%
<i>More than three</i>	13%	21%	30%	10%	26%

Although opinions regarding the use of only one interviewer were sought in the recruiters' questionnaire, Ministry policy requires more than one interviewer for each selection decision and several signatures are needed for a recommendation for appointment. In practice, it is unlikely that any interviews would be conducted using only one interviewer. This is perhaps reflected in the results which show that 22% of recruiters have no knowledge of one interviewer interviews.

### **The applicants' perspective**

The results show a slight preference overall, in terms of perceived value, for having more than one interview.

**TABLE 28: THE VALUE OF THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS PER APPLICANT AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

<i>Number of interviews</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>One</i>	0	4%	60%	32%	4%
<i>More than one</i>	3%	6%	30%	57%	4%

It is interesting to compare the recruiters' and the applicants' opinions regarding the value of the number of interviews. The "good value" percentages are almost a mirror image of each other, with recruiters ascribing more value to one interview (62%) and applicants ascribing more value to more than one interview (57%). In practice, applicants are rarely brought back in for a subsequent interview.

A three-person panel is regarded, by applicants, as providing the best value. More than three, whilst being the least preferred of the four options, was still seen by respondents as having some value.

**TABLE 29: THE VALUE OF THE NUMBER OF INTERVIEWERS  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

<i>Number of interviews</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>One</i>	4%	42%	45%	6%	3%
<i>Two</i>	0	6%	50%	44%	0%
<i>Three</i>	4%	7%	34%	55%	0%
<i>More than three</i>	17%	45%	26%	4%	8%

Recruiters' and applicants' responses whilst differing in their actual percentage numbers were similar in their rankings of the value of the number of interviewers. Both samples thought that a three-person panel gave the best value, and that a two-person panel was second best although applicants ascribed a two-person panel with more value than did the recruiters. More than three interviewers were seen by both recruiters and applicants as having little to moderate value.

## Mode of interview

The most common mode of interviewing, by far, is face to face interviewing (96% always, 3% mostly), with telephone interviewing and teleconferencing occurring in only a few instances, usually only if an applicant is overseas.

## The value of different modes of interviewing

### (i) The recruiters' perspective

Face to face interviewing is regarded as having good value by 88% of the sample, compared with 0% who view telephone interviewing and teleconferencing as having good value.

**TABLE 30: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT MODES OF INTERVIEW  
AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
Face-to-face	0	0	9%	88%	3%
Telephone	33%	38%	21%	0	8%
Tele-conferencing	47%	21%	20%	0	12%

### (ii) The applicants' perspective

Face to face interviewing is regarded as having good value by 100% of the sample, as shown in table 31. Over one-half of the sample of applicants ascribe little or no value to telephone interviewing.

**TABLE 31: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT MODES OF INTERVIEW  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)**

	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
Face-to-face	0	0	0	100%	0
Telephone	9%	53%	38%	0	0
Tele-conferencing	25%	49%	26%	0	0

Although there is a move towards new technologies in the workplace, the interview remains an area where meeting someone face to face is still the most popular mode. It is interesting to consider if this will change in the future as new technologies continue to advance or whether the interview will remain one of the few areas in which doing things “in the old-fashioned way” is preferred. It is hard to pick up on subtle nuances and body language if a person is not (bodily) present with the interviewer and this is perhaps why telephone interviewing is not popular and is not seen as having good value. Perhaps the use of a video screen where the applicant can be seen as well as heard will increase the perceived usefulness of this mode of interviewing.

## **Assessment**

Recruiters were asked how they make an assessment of the applicant through the interview and at the end of the interview. They commented:

### During the interview

*“There are no set points or critical factor scores during the interview. Notes are taken for each response [to questions] and on the applicant’s body language.”*

*“I take notes/scores against critical factors.”*

*“I keep responses in my head, and make notes after the applicant leaves, or brief notes during the interview.”*

*“They’re assessed on how they are answering the question and if they answer the*

*question, on presentation - clothing and attitude, the impression they make, whether they would fit into the organisation and enthusiasm. Notes are taken on question responses and also of impressions - quiet etc. Impressions based on dress and so on are not written down."*

*"We usually have one note-taker, the others listen to responses to questions."*

### At the end of interviews

*"After each interview and at the end of all interviews, marks are assigned from 1 to 5 on responses to questions, by all panel members. We discuss applicants and if they meet the criteria we then compare one against the other."*

*"The final decision is made by ranking candidates against each other and against the job description. We don't use numbers; the decision is made by consensus."*

*"We compare scores and then discuss scores against critical factors, agree, then multiply them by weighting them. We do not automatically pick the person with the highest score. Scores are a tool only."*

*"At the end of the interview we ask each other – "what do you think - yes or no? " We already know if the person has the skills [through their CV] so we are assessing personality factors and level of experience as well as skill."*

These comments show that the assessment ranges in terms of its structure from an informal discussion based on overall impressions to a quasi-scientific numbering and weighting system. Some recruiters focus more on job tasks and skills in the interview whilst others see the interview more as an opportunity to explore personality and team-fit factors.

## **Interview Dynamics**

### **Power differentials in the interview**

Panel dynamics and power differentials were explored in the in-depth interviews with recruiters. Several recruiters, when asked about who had the decision making power in the interview, responded that when their boss was also on the panel they deferred to the decisions that their boss made. Other comments included:

*"I haven't been aware of power differentials but people from the outside often defer to those who are inside or close to the position."*

*"If the chairperson wanted, or didn't want, a person, then they would have more say because they know more of the technical requirements of the position but other panel members need to be sure they [the applicants] meet all the criteria first."*

*"If a senior panel member says " I don't want to interview this person", then their say, because of seniority will have more weight. Other panel members do not want to disagree with this person."*

This phenomenon is expanded on further in the Discussion chapter.

### **Influence of the panel - the applicants' perspective**

Fifty-five percent (55%) of applicants responded that the selection panel had influenced their decision to accept the job. For most (96%) of those who had been influenced by the panel, the influence was a positive one. For a few (4%), the

influence was a negative one, but they decided to accept the job offer anyway. In a way, the relative percentages are to be expected considering that only applicants who were successful and who accepted the job were surveyed. One would expect that the percentage of applicants who were influenced negatively by the panel would be higher amongst those who either were not successful or who declined a job offer.

### A positive influence

When asked what it was about the panel that influenced their decision, respondents listed the following positive aspects:

*"The interview took place in the workplace so I got a "feel" for the place."*

*"I felt comfortable; the interviewers were approachable, likeable, helpful, committed to the job."*

*"The panel were enthusiastic about the direction of the Ministry."*

*"Rapport was established, I liked the people I would be working with [panel members] – they were friendly, professional and had good personalities."*

*"The panel displayed commitment and understanding of the position and gave me a better understanding of the position."*

*"The panel were positive and well-organised."*

*"The panel were articulate and clear; the panel seemed very professional and the panel included an advisor which portrayed good staff/management relations."*

*"The panel were personable, thorough, professional and they "sold" the job".*

### A negative influence

Negative influences included the panel's personal mannerisms - lack of eye contact and limited social skills were specifically mentioned.

The fact that over half of the applicants were influenced by the panel supports the critical contact theories as set out in the literature review. This group of theories argue that recruiters and organisational representatives whom the applicants meet, have a critical influence when applicants are deciding between job offers (Glueck, 1973). The personality of the interviewer, in particular their personal warmth and perceived interest in the applicant, how willing they are to provide job information and the age of the interviewer can all influence the applicant's reaction to the selection process and their likelihood of accepting a job offer (Young et al, 1986; Schmitt et al, 1976). These factors were evidenced in the present research.

### **Perceived limitation of the selection interview – recruiters**

In the in-depth interviews recruiters were asked if they could see any, or had found any, limitations with using a selection interview. Whilst one person responded with a succinct “no”, other comments had a different flavour. Actual comments included:

*“Yes, it’s a stab in the dark, an imperfect tool. Articulate people perform better at interview than good hard workers who might be better in the job.”*

*“Occasionally some [unsuitable] people score well. Structured interviews are good, but by themselves they have limitations especially if the panel is not skilled or trained.”*

*“All they really tell you is how good people are in interview situations, they don’t tell you how people are with higher level skills/motivation. Even referee checking may not give*

*you this information – only the referee’s opinion.”*

*“There’s no fail-safe method. It has got its limitations. Interviewers like to think they can judge people, but there’s no guarantee of a good result”.*

Comments show that recruiters have an awareness of the limitations of interviews in general and of unstructured interviews in particular. Several recruiters who were interviewed, use and acknowledge the contribution of other assessment tools to compliment the interview, particularly work-samples.

## **ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES (OTHER THAN INTERVIEW)**

### **Recruiters**

All interviewed recruiters, except two, had used selection methods other than the interview. A work sample exercise was quoted most and examples included a word-processing test, a spreadsheet analysis, a written exercise involving policy work, and a presentation. One recruiter asked applicants to provide him with a portfolio of their previous work. Two had used personality tests that a consultant had chosen (and they were not aware which tests they were), and two had used the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) by Saville & Holdsworth. One commented that the applicant they had chosen turned out to have *“personality shortcomings”* and perhaps this could have been avoided if they had used an OPQ.

One recruiter used an assessment centre approach, which he developed after a bad selection decision, which was based solely on an interview. He explained -

*“the applicant interviewed well and the panel agreed. His CV looked good and he had high qualifications. One panel member suspected something was wrong, but didn’t know what. He turned out to have poor listening/learning skills and poor social skills. It was a poor fit and he left after several months”.*

The assessment centre involves five activities and lasts for one day:

*“The shortlisted applicants - usually five or so, are advised of the assessment centre and given two weeks to write and reference an essay which they are to debate and discuss with a team member, at the assessment centre. This tests their writing skills, research skills, ability to order thoughts on paper and ability to express themselves verbally. The second activity involves a strategic case study. They have one hour to analyse two pages and come up with a strategy on how to deal with problems that arise. They can present their strategy in a variety of ways – notes, whiteboard, etc. They are questioned on their strategy by a member of the panel. There is no set time limit for this exercise. The third activity focuses on financial analysis. They can do this on the computer, excel, pen and paper or whatever else they choose. This activity is designed to test their level of accounting knowledge. The applicant then sits with each member of the team to see exactly what they do for example, it could be answering an Official Information Act request or doing a spreadsheet analysis. This enables them to have a realistic glimpse of the job and usually lasts about thirty minutes per applicant, during which time they can ask as many questions as they like.*

*The team then rank all applicants, via a discussion, on a variety of dimensions, for example, reaction to tasks, inquisitiveness. We don’t use a structured form for this, but we do use the same criteria for each applicant.*

*The applicant then has a half-hour break before their interview, which is the fifth and final activity. They are interviewed by the manager, an HR [Human Resources] person and another senior investigator. The primary goal of the interview is to ask more probing questions and get other panel members' opinions, and to ask exactly the same questions to enable comparability between applicants.*

*The day after the interview all of the group get together and look at all the information. A matrix is developed including information from interviews, discussions with staff, work samples etc. Ticks and crosses are made on these and also on subjective things, such as would the person fit into the group, and perhaps gender mix as well. ”*

This recruiter found this method works particularly well for him and has appointed three people using this method all of who have turned out to be successful in their jobs.

One of the applicants selected using this method commented:

*“The process was quite long. I became tired and relaxed, but some applicants may have become stressed and not have presented themselves well. I felt that I had the opportunity to present myself well in many aspects, also the opportunity to be heard - justify my own decisions and put my thinking processes on display. All candidates completed the same process and the range of skills indicated where you excelled or needed improvement, so I thought it was a fair process”.*

**Recruiters were also asked “why did you first begin using this other method?”**

*“I wasn't satisfied that interviews gave a clear enough picture of how a person actually performed in the job.”*

*“To try to avoid making selection mistakes.”*

*"To test skills that can't be tested by looking at the CV."*

**Recruiters were asked to comment on what they considered to be the advantages and limitations of this method:**

### Advantages

*"It can support information provided. If someone had a bad interview and did well on the test, we might want to re-look at them – possibly they were nervous etc. – we might explore further."*

*"They give information that you can't really pick up on in an interview, like how a person reacts under pressure and in various scenarios."*

*"If three candidates are similar, then the work sample could make the difference."*

### Limitations

*"Motivation to perform can not be assessed."*

*"Can make wrong decisions. Some people don't test well, some people are good at some types of tests – some are speed oriented."*

*"Can't really test anything in a realistic time-frame."*

Comments from interviewed recruiters showed that they had a basic knowledge of the use of other methods in the selection process and several had a good knowledge of these. It is interesting that these comments could not be generalised to all Ministry recruiters, for the responses to the questionnaire gave a different picture. Whilst interviewed recruiters were aware of other methods, particularly work samples, and incorporated these into their selection procedures as appropriate, this was not typical of selection processes in the Ministry as evidenced in the questionnaire results which follow.

### (i) Actual practice

Personality questionnaires, interest inventories and group tests, are rarely used as part of the selection process. In parts of the Ministry work samples are used more frequently, although in some instances this involves asking the applicant to supply a copy of a written piece of work for example, rather than asking them to complete a job relevant work sample exercise as part of the selection process. Literacy/ numeracy tests and aptitude/ability tests are used at times, as shown in the table below.

TABLE 32: THE USE OF DIFFERENT SELECTION METHODS (N= 112)

<i>Selection Method</i>	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Personality questionnaires</i>	78%	10%	4%	1%	7%
<i>Interest Inventories</i>	74%	10%	4%	4%	8%
<i>Literacy/numeracy tests</i>	53%	30%	4%	5%	8%
<i>Work samples</i>	55%	15%	15%	15%	0%
<i>Aptitude/ability tests</i>	49%	31%	7%	5%	8%

In one part of the Ministry, an assessment centre approach is used, as previously described.

### (ii) Perceived value

Work samples are seen, by recruiters, as giving the best value. Literacy/numeracy tests and aptitude/ability tests are viewed as having moderate to good value. Personality questionnaires and interest inventories are seen as having some value.

**TABLE 33: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT SELECTION METHODS  
AS PERCEIVED BY RECRUITERS (N= 112)**

<i>Selection Method</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Personality questionnaires</i>	38%	23%	29%	10%	0
<i>Interest Inventories</i>	44%	21%	27%	5%	3%
<i>Literacy/numeracy tests</i>	32%	13%	35%	20%	0
<i>Work samples</i>	24%	6%	34%	35%	1%
<i>Aptitude/ability tests</i>	33%	11%	27%	25%	4%

Approximately one-third of recruiters had no knowledge of literacy/numeracy tests, ability tests or personality tests. A higher proportion (44%) had no knowledge of interest inventories.

The literature review highlighted researchers who noted that suggestions on how the selection process might be improved have not had any significant effect on actual practice (e.g. Di Milia et al, 1994). Taylor et al (1993) put forward three reasons why many organisations in New Zealand may not be using more valid selection methods – lack of knowledge of the validity of various selection methods, the high development costs of methods such as assessment centres, and the perceived potential for adverse impact (“a measure of the degree to which a particular procedure has a negative effect on the member of a protected minority group”, Landy, 1989 p.273). Whilst the latter two were not evident in the responses in the present study, the lack of knowledge of other selection methods and their relative validity was clearly evident.

## Applicants

### Perceived value

Work samples and ability tests are seen, by applicants, as giving the best value and ability tests are seen to have moderate to good value. Literacy/numeracy tests and personality questionnaires are, on average, viewed as having moderate value, although opinion ranges from little or no value to good value. Although almost half of respondents thought that interest inventories were of moderate value, over one-third considered them to have little or no value in the selection process.

TABLE 34: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT SELECTION METHODS  
AS PERCEIVED BY APPLICANTS (N= 53)

<i>Selection Method</i>	Have no knowledge	Little or no value	Moderate value	Good value	% who didn't respond to question
<i>Personality questionnaires</i>	17%	21%	47%	15%	0
<i>Interest Inventories</i>	15%	38%	45%	2%	0
<i>Literacy/numeracy tests</i>	15%	23%	38%	24%	0
<i>Work samples</i>	11%	15%	36%	32%	6%
<i>Aptitude/ability tests</i>	13%	19%	38%	30%	0%

## WRITE-UPS

The recommendation for appointment is usually in the form of a narrative or write up. In over one-third of instances the write-up is accompanied by scores against critical factors and in just under a third of instances, other forms of supportive documentation, for example work samples and referee reports, are supplied.

## CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTION METHODS TO OVERALL SELECTION DECISION

In the in-depth interviews recruiters were asked “what contribution does each selection method, including referee checks, make to their overall selection decision?”

Most comments point to the final decision being primarily based on information from the interview, often with support from other methods, with referee checks seen as a final check or hurdle that the applicant has to successfully pass.

*“Not scientifically done, all weighed up in the decision-making, for example if written ability is a major requirement, then it is weighted quite highly.”*

*“They contribute to assessment under a particular competency. On the support side a typing/administration test would be about 50% and the interview the other 50%. For a policy job, the work sample or test would be roughly 10 to 20% and the interview 80 to 90%.”*

*“It’s like a series of hurdles – if they pass the initial requirements they make the short-list; if they pass the interview they have a referee check.”*

*“Each method is used as an additional yardstick to move the person a little higher or lower – only one part of the whole process.”*

## ASSESSING FOR POTENTIAL

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked if, when choosing an applicant, they take into account the person's potential for future promotion or development and if so, how do they assess this potential? Comments reflected that recruiters tend to recruit not just for the immediate job, but also for the future:

*"I take into account future potential, not for the whole Ministry, but for within the unit. I assess this through looking at their self-development, university study, updating their knowledge base, interests, community involvement etc."*

*"I look for potential. Part of the job is taking over when the manager is away. It's assessed by interview questions focusing on parts of the manager's job and where they see themselves in five years time."*

*"We look for a person who can go elsewhere as well. We assess this in the assessment centre."*

*"Both for the job - 80% and for potential - 20%. It's not assessed in any formal way."*

The following comment illustrates what may happen if an individual is recruited for their future potential:

*"As a whole we recruited for potential but the person became dissatisfied with the job they were appointed to. They were assessed against a generic job description which has much broader criteria – more room to move".*

Selecting for potential may result in unrealistic expectations on the part of some applicants, unless specific details of the immediate job selected for are spelt out

at the time of selection. Dissatisfaction may occur if the applicant believes they were promised more than they got, or if they were over qualified for the job at hand – i.e. if expectations are not met. The occurrence of this phenomenon was supported by the applicants' comments in the exit interviews.

Smith et al (1989) state that it might be prudent to select for the job at hand, but also for the ability to adapt to change and to learn. However, they also suggest that this may cause difficulties in countries like the United States where equal employment opportunities legislation discourages trying to predict for unknown conditions, which is what occurs when applicants are assessed for potential or future development. Although organisations need bright new recruits capable of future promotion, selecting on this basis may have its own disadvantages.

## **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE APPLICANTS' DECISION TO ACCEPT THE JOB**

When asked what were the key factors that influenced their decision to accept the job, the majority (52%) of applicants responded that the job itself and job content were the key factors, 16% responded that remuneration was a key factor, 13% responded that the work environment was a key factor and 5% listed the prospect of working for the Ministry as a key factor. Other factors listed by the respondents included: *“receiving a basic grounding after university”, “working with the Chief Executive”, “first job offer”, “part-time hours of work” and “career development”*.

## **Opportunity to present themselves**

All interviewed applicants felt that they were given ample opportunity to present themselves in the interview. Three people made specific comment on the informal, relaxed nature of the interview, which aided in the open exchange of information.

## **HOW DID THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT TURN OUT?**

In the in-depth interviews recruiters were asked if the person they'd chosen in 1996 had turned out as they had expected them to, were they performing successfully in the job and if so, what did they feel contributed to the good fit between applicant and position? If not, what critical factor/s was the applicant lacking, was this assessed at selection time and what could have been done in hindsight, to improve the fit? Thirteen responded that the person had turned out to be successful in the job, three said that the applicant had not. Comments included:

### Successful

*"Yes, but it was just chance. It could have turned out either way." (Selection methods - interview and referee check).*

*Yes, definitely. Both were internal candidates, so they already had experience. It was successful because they had background knowledge". (Selection methods - interview, referee check).*

*“Yes. Reasonably sound selection practices and the applicants had the motivation to succeed and both already had a track record in the Ministry.” (Interview, work samples and referee check).*

*“Yes, but she required quite a bit of coaching – didn’t pick things up quickly, but two years later seems to be working out OK.” ( interview, work sample and referee check).*

### Not successful

*“No. OK, but personality shortcomings. Maybe we should have carried out a personality questionnaire or sat with the applicants to give them a realistic view of the job.” (interview and referee check).*

*“No, probably not, but because of environmental changes not because of people or process. The process did identify strengths and weaknesses and they’ve been true to this. They’ve both been successful to a degree, given the nature of the environment.” (Interview, portfolios of previous work and referee check).*

*“Definitely not. Possibly we should have used something to assess personality or ability to do day to day work. She had the right answers, but wasn’t completely honest.” (interview, work sample and referee check).*

Recruiters were asked if they had ever been involved in a selection decision where the applicant had failed to perform successfully in the job. In response, thirteen recruiters commented that they had been involved in decisions in which the successful applicant failed to perform. Three recruiters had never been involved in such a situation.

The table below sets out the comments from recruiters who were involved in eight prior instances where a bad selection decision was made. The various dimensions i.e. questions asked, are set out across the top of the table.

**TABLE 35: AN EXPLORATION OF THE REASONS FOR POOR SELECTION DECISIONS**

Selection method	What was lacking?	Was this addressed in the selection process?	Perceived reason for the bad decision	What (in hindsight) would you have done differently?
Interview	"personality fit with manager"	"No"	"wrong questions were asked"	————
Interview	"attitude & judgement"	"No"	"lack of training in up to date selection methods, relying only on the interview, failure to use other methods."	"OPQ & thorough referee check"
Interview	"a key skill"	"Only by asking questions such as – from time to time you'll need to do this –do you have a problem with it? The answer was always no."	"not sure"	"A practical test – should have focused on testing for typing and shorthand. These were identified as critical factors"
Structured interview	"didn't fit with Ministry values and a lack of interpersonal skills."	"We asked open-ended questions. There were warning bells, but not loud enough, also with the referees. She interviewed the best and the referee comments weren't damaging in themselves."	"didn't use the right or enough selection methods"	"Could have asked more questions giving scenarios to measure behaviours in terms of client interactions, probed more deeply with refereeing and a work sample".
Interview and work sample	"interpersonal skills, judgement, attitude, didn't know software as well as she claimed"	"We asked questions to assess judgement – situational questions – she had the right answers. We could have probed more."	"Lack of training of interviewers, inadequacies in the selection process, could have asked more comprehensive questions, probed more although hard to do in the time available."	"Don't know what else we could have done apart from trialling her first or perhaps carrying out more comprehensive testing".
Interview	"Interpersonal skills, problem solving skills"	"Yes, by describing relationships with the team and with clients, and asking questions about this. Responses were positive/affirmative."	"Salary restriction – picked someone else, but we weren't able to pay the money- forced to go down the list until the salary was acceptable. The appointee was here for 6 months, then resigned."	"Have flexibility to offer salary commensurate with market."
Interview	"Honesty"	"No"	"Turned out to be dishonest – couldn't have been picked up in the process."	"Nothing"
Interview, "not particularly structured"	"Poor fit"	"No"	"some of the interviewers may have had training but there was a lack of skill & failure to use other selection methods".	"Use of assessment centre approach."

# STAGE FOUR – PLACEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT FOLLOW-UP

## FOLLOW-UP

In the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked if any follow-up occurs once the successful applicant is in the job. Approximately half said “no”. Comments included:

*“Not by the panel. The panel feels its duty is finished.”*

*“No, the first crunch is the performance review.”*

*“No, it’s left to the individual manager to be responsible for.”*

One responded:

*“Yes, informal contact is made - asking them how they are doing.”*

Another responded:

*“We follow a structured induction document, which lists what should happen on the first day, first month etc., although it is hard to get the managers to use it”.*

These comments provide a reasonably consistent picture that, after the selection decision is made, the successful applicant is no longer seen as the selection panel’s responsibility and is passed to the respective manager to induct and follow-up on. If the manager is also on the selection panel, some continuity is provided.

Placement and subsequent follow-up are listed as the fourth stage in the recruitment and selection process. Career planning, job design, quality of working life and productivity amongst others, are all listed as capable of affecting the level of job satisfaction, both with the job and the organisation. These factors are reflected in the information gained from the exit interviews. Placement and follow-up, as evidenced in the comments above, are more often seen as the manager's responsibility rather than the selection panel's and the selection panel usually does not follow-up on an applicant once the selection decision is made. Dissatisfaction and unrealised expectations, in terms of matching skills with duties and responsibilities, seem to be a recurrent theme throughout the results of the present research. Perhaps more involvement from the panel or the tracking of applicants, in addition to providing realistic information about the job at the time of selection, may ensure a more compatible fit and the resolution of problems prior to them becoming reasons for leaving the organisation.

## **TURNOVER OF STAFF APPOINTED IN 1996**

Of the 126 staff that were appointed in 1996, 40 had resigned from the time of appointment to 31 October 1998, 5 had taken redundancy, 3 were temporary appointments and 1 deceased. This has left a total of 78, 1996 appointees, who are still employed by the Ministry in late 1998. These figures equate to a turnover of 32%, for staff who were appointed in the 1996 calendar year and who left voluntarily i.e. resigned.

For the 40 appointees who resigned, the average overall length of time spent in the position that they were appointed to in 1996, was 13.28 months. The range was from 1 month to 23 months. Of the 40, 13 were already employed by the Ministry prior to their appointment to the position in 1996 - hence their time in the Ministry was longer. The range for this group was 13 months to 102 months (8.5 years). The average was 34 months or 2.8 years. For the 27 appointees new to the Ministry, their average time in the Ministry was 13.48 months, ranging from 3 months to 23 months.

A total of 16 exit interview notes were located for the sample of 40. This equates to 40% of the sample. Of the 16, 12 exit interviews were from appointees who were new to the Ministry in 1996, 4 were from employees who were already with the Ministry prior to their 1996 appointment. Exit interview information revealed several key reasons for individuals leaving the Ministry.

## **EXIT INTERVIEWS**

The following exit interview information was collected from staff who were appointed in the 1996 calendar year who subsequently left the Ministry. Information was collected until November 1998. Individuals agreed that the information could be released in aggregated form with no identifying features.

Restricted career development, salary and promotion were listed as the three main reasons why individuals were leaving the Ministry.

**TABLE 36: PUSH FACTORS**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned (i.e. mentioned by how many individuals)</b>
<b>Career development (lack of)</b>	5
<b>Salary (dissatisfaction with)</b>	5
<b>Promotion prospects</b>	4
<b>Job didn't meet expectations</b>	2
<b>Need for more challenge</b>	1

They said they were attracted to their new positions for several reasons set out in the table below.

**TABLE 37: PULL FACTORS**

	<b>Number of times mentioned (i.e. mentioned by how many individuals)</b>
<b>Salary/career prospects</b>	6
<b>Interesting/progressive organisation</b>	5
<b>Greater challenge</b>	5
<b>Different subject area/issues</b>	3
<b>Greater scope</b>	2
<b>Career move</b>	2
<b>More responsibility</b>	2

There were other factors that also contributed to their perception of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. These included levels of responsibility, amount of work pressure and challenge in the job. As Table 38 shows, although the majority (49%) responded that the overall levels of all three were just right, 42% responded there was not enough in two key areas, namely responsibility and challenge in their job. When just looking at the level of responsibility and the amount of challenge, an equal number responded that there was not enough responsibility as those who responded that the level was just right.

**TABLE 38: EVALUATION OF YOUR POSITION**

	Too much	Just right	Not enough
<b>Responsibility</b>	1	7	7
<b>Amount of work/work pressure</b>	3	8	3
<b>Challenge</b>	0	7	7

Further comments on the above issues included the following:

- *“Not enough opportunity to take on more responsibility”*
- *“Very routine duties and often process not set down”*
- *“Distribution of work at times disproportionate amongst staff”*
- *“Lots of work but could have been given more responsibility in keeping with skills and qualifications”*

Exiting employees rated the following from their experience in the Ministry:

**TABLE 39: RATINGS OF CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT**

	Good to very good	Average	Below average to poor
<b>Pay and rewards</b>	5	9	4
<b>Hours of work</b>	8	6	3
<b>Working conditions</b>	11	6	0
<b>Training opportunities</b>	11	4	3
<b>Development opportunities</b>	2	5	7
<b>Promotion prospects</b>	2	5	8

As shown in table 39 above, most exiting employees felt that conditions of employment were at least average. The only factors that they rated, on balance, below average were development opportunities and promotion prospects. These ratings were reinforced by comments such as:

- *“Large amounts of mundane work e.g. filing.”*
- *“My skills were under- utilised.”*
- *“No opportunity to work to my full potential or to develop my skills.”*
- *“I felt unable to deliver as effectively as I would have liked.”*

In response to the question “how accurate did you feel your job description was in comparison to the position?”, the following answers were given, as set out in Table 40, below.

**TABLE 40: ACCURACY OF JOB DESCRIPTION  
ACTUAL NUMBERS WHO RESPONDED**

<b>Accurate</b>	<b>Somewhat accurate</b>	<b>Associated comments</b>	<b>Not accurate</b>	<b>Associated comments</b>
4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job description somewhat out of date</li> </ul>	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job misrepresented in terms of duties &amp; challenges</li> <li>• Job too basic a level when compared to expectations</li> <li>• JD very general, but information in interview was accurate</li> <li>• JD very general</li> <li>• JD misleading</li> <li>• actual work did not match up to JD, and was not as described at the interview</li> <li>• JD old, not accurate</li> </ul> <p><u>Other comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “job contained high amount of tedium”</li> <li>• “there was no Job Description”</li> </ul>

NOTE:JD = job description

As shown in the table above, four exiting staff members replied that their job description was accurate, four replied it was somewhat accurate and seven replied that it was not accurate. This is a large proportion (almost half) of exiting employees who felt that their job description was not accurate and that the type and level of duties, as listed, were misleading. When these comments are looked

at in conjunction with the information from the questionnaires and in-depth interviews, there appears to be an overriding theme. Many applicants felt that the job had not turned out as they expected it to. For those whose comments are incorporated above, this may have been factor in them choosing to leave the organisation when they had been in their position for a relatively short period of time. General or inaccurate job descriptions can be compensated for when an applicant receives detailed information from another source, usually in the interview. If detailed information is not provided, the applicant can end up with a biased impression of the job, which can lead to subsequent dissatisfaction both with the job and the organisation. This is commented on further in the Discussion chapter.

## **The recruiters perspective**

Recruiters were asked if those who exited were considered to be successful in their jobs. Most responded that they had. Comments included:

*“He was perceived to be a good choice but left for more money. This was a problem in this particular division at this time.” (tenure in job – 3 months)*

*“A very good fit. The panel was pleased with the appointment but she wanted to do more policy work and this is why she left.” (tenure in job – 8 months)*

*“There were problems with his interpersonal skills. He didn’t like being in a team or open plan office. Teamwork skills were explored in the interview, but the candidate was taken on anyway because of their technical knowledge.” (tenure in job – 16 months)*

*"A reasonable fit. The appointee thought he could use his specific skills more, but the job was presented realistically at the interview." (tenure in job – 19 months)*

It is interesting to note the differing perspectives on why individuals left the organisation, reflected in the comments from recruiters and exiting staff members. The feelings of dissatisfaction so prevalent in exiting staff members' comments were not reflected to any extent in the perceptions held by recruiters about why the appointees were leaving.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

### **Recruiters**

At the end of the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews, recruiters were asked for their comments on the recruitment and selection process in general and how it might be improved. Several key themes emerged.

Several recruiters commented that "testing" to ascertain competency levels would be useful. Ability tests and work samples were mentioned as tools that more use could be made of. Several others commented that personality "fit" was an important factor as well as skill and ability fit. Personality tests were mentioned as tools that could be used to ascertain the "personality fit" of the applicant. The following examples illustrate this theme:

*"I would like a lot more "tools" available when recruiting in addition to structured interviewing; they must be simple and not too time consuming."*

*“Personality factors come into the equation too. One person we recruited had the skills to do the job, but they just couldn’t cope personality-wise.”*

Several comments focused on the revision of forms to simplify and support the current process. Suggestions included redesigning the application forms and asking applicants to target their curriculum vitae or letter of application to specific critical factors. The use of a form on which to rate each applicant against critical factors both when short-listing and when assessing suitability after interview was commented on, as a good thing.

*“The use of checklists and evaluation forms would be very handy.”*

The need for training in selection was also highlighted in the comments section by a number of respondents.

*“A training course would be good and selection would probably improve because of it. There is a need to take selection seriously as it is a time consuming task.”*

A further theme centered on the need for more accurate job descriptions that reflect the actual duties of the job and for these duties to be reflected in the interview.

*“The job description usually reflects the job in general terms, but in one instance the emphasis on budgeting and financial requirements didn’t come across in the job description. I picked up on this in the short-listing process and then focused on it in the interview. But one panel member didn’t pick this up and placed the emphasis on the original job description.”*

## Successful applicants

Suggestions from applicants to improve the selection process included providing relevant, detailed information about the job, more flexibility in recruitment methods - in particular ability tests and personality profiles, being introduced to future colleagues and the training of interviewers.

*"I believe that aptitude tests are a good idea. Also providing an applicant with an extremely detailed description of what the job entails."*

*"I feel that the panel should have an accurate and up-to-date breakdown of the job as an interviewee expects at this stage to receive honest answers regarding workload on a day to day basis, skills involved, promotion prospects and so on."*

*"I felt that I should have met my co-workers briefly."*

*"Interviewers need professional training to improve interviewing skills."*

The timing of the process was also raised.

*"Applicants should be notified of the outcome as soon as possible after the interview."*

*"I don't see the need for such a drawn out process."*

For one applicant there was a time delay of two and a half months in-between making his application and receiving advice of his interview. Although he still accepted the job, this delay affected his perception of both the Ministry and his chances of success in his application. This is commented on further, in the Discussion chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## DISCUSSION



In this chapter, recruitment and selection processes and how they are perceived by recruiters and successful applicants are discussed and related to relevant research. Information in this chapter is presented according to the stage model of recruitment and selection that is used throughout.

The literature review drew attention to the recruitment and selection process as a two-way one. Rynes (1993) states that few organisations seek feedback from the applicant's perspective and organisations wishing to improve their effectiveness in recruiting should "impose the applicant's perspective on all recruitment activities" (pg. 36). The present research results would not have been complete without considering the applicant's perspective and it is only by looking at both perspectives together that an accurate impression of the effectiveness of recruitment and selection processes is gained.

### **Recruiter/ interviewer training**

Wright (1969) states that "interviewer skill is directly related to the validity, quantity and quality of interview output" (p408). Rynes (1993) comments that the vast majority of individuals who recruit have never been trained to do so, nor do they receive any feedback on how effectively they carry out this function. The

findings from the present research are in keeping with this statement. Seventy-one percent (71%) of managers who recruited in the Ministry in 1996 had not received any training in recruitment or selection. The remaining 29% had received training over five years ago. This is interesting considering the amount of resources that are invested in recruiting and the ramifications of choosing the wrong person for the job. Many managers are trained in other facets of management e.g. financial management and communication skills - why not in recruitment and selection? Possibly it is because individuals believe that recruiting staff (particularly by interviewing) is a skill that comes naturally. Choosing an applicant who works out reasonably well in a position reinforces this viewpoint. However, research has shown that experience by itself does not make good interviewers and that people are not naturally good judges of other people (Smith et al, 1993). Secondly, as recruiting may only occur spasmodically it may not be seen to be as significant a function as other primary functions. Thirdly, individuals may not be aware of the ramifications of making a poor selection decision and of the research that has been carried out in this area. Also, there are increasingly more line managers involved in interviewing, whereas in the past this was largely a personnel function (Wright, 1969). This is also the case in the Ministry. However, coupled with the move to use more line managers, needs to be a move towards giving them the skills to select effectively. Shackleton et al (1991) pose the question "if more line managers are getting involved in selection interviews, are they also being given training in interview techniques?" (p34). The present research indicates not.

Cesare (1996) states that an essential part of any interview development plan is training and that interviewers who are not properly trained can diminish the effectiveness of an instrument that might otherwise be sound. Interview training should cover content e.g. type of questions, and process e.g. bias and rating errors. Interview training that involves opportunities for practice, discussion and feedback can be effective in improving interview performance (Smith et al, 1993).

## **STAGE ONE - ASSESSING THE JOB**

Research highlights the importance of a systematic job analysis to form the basis of recruitment and selection processes and decisions (Arnold et al, 1995; Pursell et al, 1980). Job related information should detail what is done and this information should be verified with information from other sources (Fisher et al, 1990). Relying on information from one source only may result in distortion of the information. The present results show a general lack of preparation at this stage of the recruitment process. Often an existing job description is utilised which may be amended to reflect changes in responsibilities. However, the results showed that often the job descriptions were vague and at times misleading. It can be inferred that this occurred because of the lack of sound job analysis practices. Also, the lack of a clear relationship between job content and the choice of selection methods was evidenced. Results showed that the choice of selection method was often made on the personal preference of the recruiter rather than on the job tasks. The lack of job related information on which to base

subsequent selection decisions was evidenced throughout the results and will also be touched on below, in terms of information given.

### **Giving information to the applicant**

Most of the sample of recruiters believe that giving information prior to the interview is of moderate to good value, although this does not always happen in practice. Although it is common practice to give the job description to applicants at this stage, additional information is usually only sent if it has been requested by the applicant. Similarly, the majority of the sample of successful recruits thought that giving information prior to the interview was of good value, and many responded that the job descriptions that they were given were too vague and did not give an accurate or detailed description of what was actually involved in the job on a day to day basis. If detailed information was not provided in the interview, applicants sometimes obtained an unrealistic impression of the position, often one that was more challenging and rewarding than in actuality.

This is particularly an issue when organisations utilise generic job descriptions. Generic job descriptions can be useful for career development initiatives such as rotation and secondment, as they allow for appointees to move through the organisation and to gain more experience and learn new skills. However, high expectations for future mobility need to be balanced with the realities of the first few years in the job. If the future is primarily recruited for and if this is concentrated on in the interview, the applicant will not have a realistic

expectation of what their first few months or years will be like. Research (e.g. Rynes, 1993; Wanous, 1980) has shown that often recruiters will not want to mention the routine, mundane parts of the job because they do not wish to put off an ideal applicant and lose them to one of their competitors. This was also reflected in the comments of several Ministry recruiters. However, what may happen in reality is that the individual accepts an idealised job and after experiencing the day to day realities, becomes disenchanted and leaves the organisation. The occurrence of this phenomenon was highlighted by the comments from exiting employees.

Better use can be made of information supplied to applicants by supplying relevant information about the job and the organisation prior to the interview, providing more job specific information in job descriptions and providing more opportunities for realistic job previewing and hence enabling the applicant to make a more realistic evaluation of the job and to self-select. Having a colleague or present incumbent on the interview panel to ask and answer in-depth questions on actual job content, inviting the preferred applicants to spend some time in the work environment to see what work is done on a day to day basis and incorporating more job specific and job relevant work sample exercises, are ways in which applicants can gain a more realistic overall impression of the job. Each of these additional methods was mentioned by applicants as a positive way in which the process could be improved. There are benefits for both the applicant who goes into the job with their eyes open and for the organisation that appoints

an applicant who settles into the job and does not become frustrated and disappointed once they discover the actual content of the job. The value of giving realistic job previews in reducing dissatisfaction and turnover has been shown in research, such as Wanous (1977).

In the present study, the applicants' perceptions of the amount and type of information they desire reflects the findings of published research. Although past research has not been able to specify exactly what information is most important to applicants, there are several key aspects that seem to be significant. Applicants want information to be detailed, relevant and specific; to distinguish one vacancy from another and to include some negative as well as positive information (Rynes, 1993; Wanous, 1980). Such information may not only help applicants differentiate accurately between positions and job offers, but also help their successful transition into the job, as there will be fewer surprises with regard to job content and context. However, consideration needs to be given to the amount and type of negative information given to applicants. Research has shown that whilst wanting detailed information about the job, applicants would prefer that the information be largely positive (Rynes, 1993) and may even filter out some of the negative information given. It would appear that information that is detailed and realistic, whilst not over-emphasising the negative aspects of the job, will be more favourably received and accepted by applicants.

## **STAGE TWO - ATTRACTING A FIELD OF CANDIDATES**

In the present study, the decision of where to place job advertisements is usually based on where they were placed last time. Analysis of where the best applicants came from is rarely carried out and the effectiveness of various recruitment channels is rarely assessed. Recruitment advertising is arguably the most expensive part of recruiting and selecting new staff members and therefore it is surprising that so little information is gathered on its effectiveness. This may be because to a large extent the costs are hidden and the results not immediately apparent. Keeping records of where positions are advertised and the quantity and quality of applicants i.e. the effectiveness of different methods, can be a useful tool for recruiters when they are deciding where to advertise a position.

## **STAGE THREE - ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES**

### **Interview format**

Results from the two questionnaires revealed that semi-structured interviews are the preferred interview type of both recruiters and applicants. Both recruiters and applicants liked a structure but to be able to go off on tangents or to delve into some areas in more detail if necessary or desired. Having a structure and asking the same questions of every applicant was perceived as fairer by both recruiters and applicants, as applicants were being rated against the same yardstick. Semi-

structured interviews could be promoted more as the “interview of choice” (from both perspectives) in the Ministry.

## **Selection Methods**

The most successful selection decisions are those that are based on methods that tap into the core competencies of the job. Many organisations rely on information from traditional selection methods and do not assess whether these methods are effective (Roe, 1989; Shackleton et al, 1989). In the Ministry, interviews are the main source of selection information, with few managers questioning their adequacy. Research results that have shown the efficacy of other selection methods, have not had a noticeable effect on current practice. In the Ministry, work samples were viewed as an effective selection tool although they were shown to be used in an un-structured way. Although some respondents to the questionnaire stated that they currently use work samples when recruiting, in some cases this involved asking the applicant for an example of some work that they had done, rather than requiring them to complete a vacancy specific test of their ability on a particular sample of work. Work samples were systematically used by a small number of recruiters who have successfully incorporated them into their selection processes as appropriate. In addition, many recruiters and successful applicants saw value in the use of psychological tests although these were rarely used.

Publicising and promoting the success that recruiters have had in selecting staff using these methods, may encourage other recruiters to utilise these selection methods.

### **Influence of the panel**

As mentioned in the literature review, the selection panel often influences the applicant's perception of the organisation and the likelihood of them accepting a job offer. The interviewer's behaviour can have a negative or positive influence on the applicant. Research has revealed that behaviours "reflecting warmth and thoughtfulness" e.g. frequent eye contact and willingness to give detailed information, influence the applicant to view the interviewer more favourably and convey a more positive impression of the organisation (Rynes, 1993; Thornton, 1993).

In the present study, over half of the successful applicants responded that the panel did affect their decision to accept the position. The comments, which clustered around personality factors, were along the same lines as those revealed in earlier research (e.g. Thornton, 1993). Personality factors that influenced the applicants in a positive way included enthusiasm, appearing approachable, likeable, professional and helpful. Negative influences included the panel's personal mannerisms, lack of eye contact and limited social skills.

These responses highlight the important influence that the panel has on the applicant. The recruiters are often perceived to be representative of the

organisation and if they are friendly and present a good image, the applicant perceives the organisation as one they would like to work in. As the research shows, the panel can have an enormous influence and this gives weight to the need to effectively train recruiters. Many good applicants may potentially be lost because of the behaviour of the selection panel. The choice of recruiters and their subsequent training requires more systematic attention devoted to it if organisations are to reflect a positive image and maximise the organisation's attractiveness to applicants.

In the present study, only one person reported a negative influence by the panel, which may on the surface look as though the Ministry were successful in presenting a good image to applicants. However, the sample consisted only of successful applicants and one can assume that there might be larger numbers of individuals who were influenced negatively by the panel from among those who did not choose to pursue their application, who turned down a job offer or were not successful in their application.

Research has also revealed that applicants like to have contact with potential peers or co-workers, and with employees who have similar backgrounds to themselves (Rynes, 1993). Comments made by successful applicants in the present study lent support to this conclusion. Successful applicants also felt that having someone on the panel who was familiar with the specifics of the job was beneficial, regardless of their level in the organisation. One respondent who applied for a job as an advisor commented that there was an advisor (a potential

peer) on the panel. The applicant thought that not only did this provide them with the opportunity to ask specific questions about the nature of the job, it also portrayed a good image of management/staff relations by having a mix of levels on the panel.

## **Referee Checks**

Referee checks are widely used in the Ministry and are seen by both recruiters and applicants to be of good value in terms of the quality of information that can be obtained from them. In practice, they vary considerably in terms of their structure and usefulness in the selection decision-making process. As mentioned in the literature review, structuring referee checks in the same way that interviews are structured, increases their validity considerably. Standardising and structuring referee checking procedures and basing the questions on the critical factors identified for the job, enhances their usefulness and their face validity. The information from referee checks can also be used effectively to validate information gained from interviews and curriculum vitae.

## **Feedback to applicants**

One applicant remarked on the long time delay between applying for the job and receiving a first interview. For many applicants a long time delay may be interpreted to mean they are no longer being considered and that they do not have the desired qualities or skills for the position. Many applicants interpret lack of contact as negative feedback (Rynes, 1991). There is the potential for many

suitable applicants to be lost to the organisation because of delayed feedback on their application. Prompt feedback after each recruitment stage is essential to maximise the number of applicants who will respond positively at the end of the process (Rynes et al, 1980). Rynes' (1991) research also points out that although applicants do not wish to get negative feedback, they would prefer this to no feedback at all.

It is difficult to ascertain the numbers of applicants who drop out of the process because of these delays. Maintaining contact with applicants and advising them of the progress of their application can only be of benefit to the organisation, by ensuring that a maximum number of applicants remain interested in the job and to the applicant, by keeping them informed.

### **Assessing for potential**

The results showed that many of the recruiters in this study looked for potential when selecting applicants, as well as suitability to the position at hand. If the future is focused on in the selection process, applicants may accept the job as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. However, moving upwards in the organisation is not assured. It is dependent upon vacancies becoming available and upon the applicant meeting the merit criteria of being the best person for the job. A successful applicant, believing they were promised advancement, may become discouraged and lose motivation in their present position if they are not successful in obtaining a higher level position. Perhaps recruiting for potential

should not be an explicit part of the selection process unless it is realistic, for example selecting a management recruit.

### **Power differentials in the selection process.**

Whilst the vacancy schedules showed a similar role for each member of the selection panel (unless one was a note-taker), the in-depth interviews revealed that quite often there was a subtle imbalance of power, particularly if one panel member was a senior staff member to whom another panel member reported. In some ways the imbalance of decision-making power is reasonable and even preferable, considering that it is often the senior member of the panel who will be responsible for the new appointee and therefore s/he needs to feel comfortable with the choice of applicant. However, an imbalance, resulting in one person's opinion taking precedence over others, can by its very nature negate from the quality and objectiveness of small group decision-making. Webster (1964) makes the following comment on panel (board) interviews: "one may speculate that the presence of several judges sharpens the perception of each, but it is equally plausible to state that most judges will seek to support the most influential member of the Board" (p115). This phenomenon may be something to bear in mind when deciding on the composition of selection panels and panel dynamics would make an interesting focus for further study.

## **STAGE FOUR – PLACEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT FOLLOW-UP**

### **Follow-up on newcomers**

One applicant commented that once in the job they were left to “sink or swim”. Other applicants provided similar comments. In-depth interviews revealed that the selection panel does not often follow-up on a successful applicant to see how they are getting on, as it is felt that this is the manager’s responsibility. One person stated that it is difficult to get managers to follow an induction procedure largely because of other commitments. Keeping in touch with newcomers and inducting them into the practices and culture of the organisation can only serve to enhance satisfaction in, and commitment to, the organisation. The present research has revealed that for some new staff members, the first real follow-up and feedback on how they are doing in the job, is at performance review time which can be up to a year after they commence employment. This is often too late to address issues that have arisen. This may be responsible in part, for the relatively large number of new recruits who leave the Ministry in the first year or so after commencement. More can be done to follow-up on newcomers and to ease their assimilation into the organisation.

### **Limitations of study and suggestions for future study**

Two sources of bias may have affected the results of this study. Firstly, the timing of the questionnaires and interviews may have influenced the results to an extent. Applicants may have answered differently in hindsight than they would

have if they had been asked for their opinions directly after the interviews. However, it is not possible to tell the extent to which the answers may have differed, or if earlier responses would have been more accurate or less accurate than later responses. Secondly, successful applicants may have answered differently because they were successful i.e. their answers may be biased in a positive direction. This may have been the case to a greater extent had only a questionnaire design been employed to elicit information. In-depth interviews provided the forum for candid discussion that hopefully minimised this bias to an extent.

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, utilising the opinions of unsuccessful applicants may have given a more balanced picture of recruitment and selection processes. Unsuccessful applicants could not be contacted, for access to their personal information is governed by the Privacy Act (1993) and, under this Act, is not kept for any lengthy period of time and is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was given. To facilitate future study in this area, it may be worthwhile to include a question on the standard application form, for example -“From time to time the Ministry reviews its selection practices and welcomes the input of applicants - may we contact you in the future to ask your views on our processes?” This will enable researchers to contact applicants should they be unsuccessful, withdraw from the process or not take up the position.

In conclusion, Wright (1969) states that “there has been a disturbing lack of research on the selection interview in civil service jurisdictions at all levels” (p.409) and that such organisations would provide a fertile place for study. There is a need for more research to be carried out on recruitment and selection procedures, particularly in a New Zealand context, and particularly in the public sector or in the comparison of public sector practices to private sector practices. Whilst such research is beyond the scope of this project, this study has clearly indicated the value of future research along such lines.

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# PART A

## SECTION A - GENERAL INFORMATION

**A1** What is your Name: .....

Title: .....

Division: .....

**A2** How long have you been employed by the Ministry?

less than 1 year       1-5 years       over 5 years

**A3** How many selection decisions have you been involved in over the past year? (Jan-Dec 1996)

.....

**A4** Have you received any training in recruitment and selection methods? (e.g. selection interviewing)

If yes, please specify:  Yes       No

.....

Date of training .....

**A5** What was your role in these decisions (e.g. panel member, panel convenor, administrative/support etc)

.....

.....

**A6** Which types of positions were you involved in recruiting for (and were they from within your Division or outside of it)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
policy staff	administrative/ support	technical	specialist/ business support	third tier managers and above
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
inside	outside	inside	outside	inside
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
inside	outside	inside	outside	inside

**Please fill out a separate Part B for each of the job types ticked.**

**PART B**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Division: \_\_\_\_\_

**Job Type**policy  
staffadministrative  
support

technical

specialist/  
business  
supportthird tier  
manager  
and above**SECTION A**

1A How do you usually advertise? (more than one may be ticked)				
		ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER
1	Note for Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Specialist papers (e.g. Lawlink)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	State Services Circular	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Networks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Universities, learning institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Personnel or Management Consultants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1B Where do you usually advertise? (more than one may be ticked)				
		ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER
1	Locally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Nationally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Overseas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Do you use Personnel or Management Consultants?			<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
	If yes, for which positions did you use them? (Jan-Dec 1996)?			
	.....			

		ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER
<i>Continued from page 2</i>				
(i)	Do you use them for			
1	Advertising positions and accepting applications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Short-listing candidates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Assessment/testing of candidates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Developing job descriptions/competencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Other (please specify)			
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii)	Did you brief the consultant on the Ministry's EEO policies and procedures?			
			YES	NO
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART B****SECTION B - SHORTLISTING**

(i) With the vacancies that you have been involved in, how many people are usually involved in shortlisting applicants?			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>			
	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
Are they all members of the panel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Are candidates short-listed against: (more than one may be ticked)			
	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
- Competencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Critical factors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Job Description	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Person specification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Other (please specify)			
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
(iii) Are records kept of why some applicants are short-listed and others are not shortlisted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART B****SECTION C**

IF YOU ARE NOT SURE OF ANY OF THE METHODS MARKED\* PLEASE REFER TO THE GLOSSARY OF TERMS ON PAGE 12

**METHODS USED FOR RECRUITING**

*For each of the following methods, please indicate whether and how often you use it, by ticking the appropriate box (e.g. if an application form is used occasionally, or is provided by only some candidates tick the sometimes box).*

Never	=	never use the method
Sometimes	=	used for some vacancies (less than half)
Mostly	=	used for most vacancies (at least half the time)
Always	=	used for all vacancies

**NEVER****SOMETIMES****MOSTLY****ALWAYS****C1 GIVING INFORMATION  
(regarding job and  
Ministry)**Information sent to applicants prior to interview Information given at interview \*Realistic job preview **C2 BACKGROUND  
INFORMATION  
(from candidates)**\*Traditional application forms \*Weighted application forms, biodata Curriculum Vitae Letter of application Records of achievement (e.g. Diploma, certificate) **C3 REFERENCES - Does the  
candidate provide:**Letters of Reference Telephone references/names of referees to contact

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	MOSTLY	ALWAYS
<b>Do you use references (or referees) for information about:</b>				
Character or personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educational attainment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-related performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>C4 INTERVIEWS</b>				
(i) Number:				
- one interview only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- more than one interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Size:				
- one interviewer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- two interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- more than three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Type:				
*Unstructured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
*Structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
*Semi-structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
*Situational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Mode:				
Face-to-face	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tele-conferencing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		NEVER	SOMETIMES	MOSTLY	ALWAYS
<b>C5</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES</b>				
	*Personality questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Interest inventories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Literacy/numeracy tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Aptitude/ability tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Group tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Work sample, job simulations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>C6</b>	<b>OTHER METHODS</b>				
	Please specify:				
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART B****SECTION D**

We would like to have your evaluation of all the selection and recruitment methods of which you have some knowledge - **whether or not you actually use them.**

1 Please rate the following in terms of the value of the information you get from the method to assist you in getting the person with the best fit to both job and organisation.					
	<b>HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>LITTLE OR NO VALUE</b>	<b>MODERATE VALUE</b>	<b>GOOD VALUE</b>	
<b>D1</b>	<b>GIVING INFORMATION</b>				
	Information sent to applicants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Information given at interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Realistic job preview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D2</b>	<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>				
	*Traditional application forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Weighted application forms, biodata	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Curriculum Vitae	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Letter of application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Records of achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D3</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>				
	Letters of reference	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Telephone references/names of referees to contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D4</b>	<b>INTERVIEWS</b>				
	(i) Number:				
	- one interview only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	- more than one interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE	LITTLE OR NO VALUE	MODERATE VALUE	GOOD VALUE
-	two interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	more than three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii)	Type:				
	*Unstructured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Semi-structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Situational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv)	Mode:				
	Face to face	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tele-conferencing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D5</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES</b>				
	*Personality questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Interest inventories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Literacy/numeracy tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Aptitude/ability tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Group tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	*Work sample, job simulations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D6</b>	<b>OTHER METHODS</b>				
	Please specify:				
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART B****SECTION E- PROCEDURES**

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	MOSTLY	ALWAYS	
1	In the interview:				
-	are applicants rated against critical factors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	are notes taken against set questions asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If so, are they taken by all members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	or by a notetaker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	do you use the interview procedures outlined in the Ministry's Personnel Manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Is the recommendation for appointment				
-	in the form of a narrative or write-up	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	with scores against critical factors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	with any other supportive data (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....					
3	Are referees called:				
-	before final selection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	after final selection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	by the panel Chairperson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	by panel member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	by HR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	using formalised, structured questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	using unstructured questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	who are not nominated by candidate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART C**

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Do you have any other comments on the recruitment selection processes in the Ministry or how these may be improved?**

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**Do you envisage any training will be needed, or any other way that we can help managers to be more effective in the selection of staff?**

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**Thank you for the time that you have taken to complete this questionnaire.**  
If you would like to discuss these issues further, please contact Leanne Brown on 4742 624 or extn 8624 Monday-Wednesday or one of the Review of Recruitment Practices Project Team in your Division.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

aptitude/ability tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ability tests measure individual strengths in technical/practical areas (e.g. numerical skills or mechanical ability)</li> <li>- aptitude tests measure the potential of applicants to learn or perform in particular jobs</li> </ul>
biodata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- biographical information which is linked to pre-determined successful job performance factors</li> </ul>
critical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the competencies, experience, and attributes necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the position (each factor should be weighted to reflect its relative importance)</li> </ul>
group tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- usually include a combination of aptitude and ability exercises in a group setting (e.g. presentation skills). Usually part of an assessment centre</li> </ul>
interest inventories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- designed to measure or reflect an individual's occupational and personal interests</li> </ul>
literacy/numeracy tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ability tests specifically designed to measure literacy or numeracy ability</li> </ul>
personality questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- designed to measure and reflect an individual's personality traits</li> </ul>
realistic job preview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- information which accurately reflects the actual content of the job</li> </ul>
semi-structured interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interview has some set questions to give some structure, or broad areas to be covered, but these are departed from when particular points of interest arise and are pursued</li> </ul>

- situational interview - applicants are asked what they would do in certain circumstances. The circumstances relate directly to those of the job vacancy
- structured interview - interview is conducted using only a pre-set, agreed series of questions, so that the interview has a formal pattern or structure
- traditional application forms - a standardised form requesting information from the applicant, (e.g. name, address, work experience and so on)
- unstructured interview - interview progresses as a mainly unplanned discussion
- weighted application forms - application forms which are constructed in order to get information on items rated as more significant than others in predicting an individual's success in a job
- work sample/job simulations - tests or exercises that are built on a sample job task. These tests are job relevant, for example, an advisor may be asked to complete an 'in basket' exercise where they process the contents of a typical 'in basket'.

1 July 1997

Appendix 1a

**TO :**

**FROM : LEANNE BROWN  
SAHR**

**SUBJECT : REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT PRACTICES WITHIN THE  
MINISTRY**

Attached is a questionnaire, the responses from which are designed to give a comprehensive picture of current practice with regard to recruitment and selection practices, within the Ministry of Commerce. Your name has been given to me by your Division, as someone who has been involved in the recruitment and selection process during the period from January 1996 to December 1996.

The review of recruitment and selection practices is one of the objectives in the Ministry's HR/EEO Plan. This review supports the Ministry's strategic intents by ensuring we can recruit and select high quality staff who have the skills that we require. In order to review our recruitment and selection procedures, we firstly need to determine what it is we are currently doing, and then ascertain how we can do it better, as well as looking at other methods and procedures that may support our processes and in turn, support the Ministry's values.

As I have already mentioned, this questionnaire is designed to give an overall picture of current practice. It is not designed to determine if individuals or divisions are using Ministry policies and procedures per se. As such, there are no right or wrong answers. Please try to answer the questions as openly and honestly as you can. There will be follow-up interviews with some of the respondents after the information contained in the questionnaires has been analyzed. Participation in the follow-up interview is completely voluntary. Should your name be chosen, you will be contacted by Leanne Brown or one of the Project Team and asked to participate in an interview. All information received either through the questionnaire or through the one-on-one interviews will be treated as confidential. The information that you provide will form the basis of a report to Ministry managers and be utilised as part of a University research project.

You will find one copy of Part A of the questionnaire and 5 copies of Part B of the questionnaire, attached. There is a different Part B to be completed for each position type you have been involved in recruiting for. These position types are listed in question A6 of the questionnaire. If you have been involved in the recruitment process for one position type only, you just need to fill in one Part A and one Part B and return the other 4 Part Bs to me, blank. Please return the entire questionnaire to me, plus any blanks by Friday July the 11th, 1997.

I appreciate the time and energy that you are taking to complete this questionnaire. I believe the end result will be enhanced recruitment and selection processes for the Ministry, both in terms of efficiency, and in terms of effectiveness by providing managers with the tools to recruit and select people with the right skills, knowledge

and attributes to fill their vacancies, and by supporting the Ministry in pursuing its strategic direction.

Any comments that you may have on the recruitment and selection process would be welcome and I would be glad to discuss further any of the points or issues raised in the questionnaire.

Many thanks

Leanne Brown  
SAHR

**SECTION A**

**IF YOU ARE NOT SURE OF ANY OF THE METHODS MARKED\* PLEASE REFER TO THE GLOSSARY OF TERMS AT THE BACK OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**METHODS USED FOR RECRUITING**

*Please indicate whether the method was used, by ticking the appropriate box*

		YES	NO	
<b>C1 INFORMATION</b> (regarding the job and the Ministry)				What type of information?
	Were you sent information prior to interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....
	Did you request more information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....
	Was information given to you at the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....
	Were you given a *realistic job preview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....
	Were you given sufficient information to:			Comments
	- enable you to construct an effective application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....
- to accurately assess the job's content and its attractiveness (or otherwise) to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....	

**Comments continued (if necessary)**

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**SECTION B**

(Try to think back to what actually happened when you went through the selection process with the Ministry and to what worked well and would could have worked better?)

**We would like to have your evaluation of some selection and recruitment methods. If you're not sure of the meaning of some of the methods, please refer to the Glossary of terms at the back of the questionnaire.**

1 Please rate the following in terms of its value (in getting the best person/job fit).				
	HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE	LITTLE OR NO VALUE	MODERATE VALUE	GOOD VALUE
Please tick one box in each horizontal line				
<b>D1 GIVING INFORMATION (i.e. when do you think it is better to give information to the applicant?)</b>				
Information sent to applicants prior to the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information given at interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
*Realistic job preview (see Glossary)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION (what type of job application has greater value in terms of the information it can give the Ministry about you?)</b>				
Traditional (Ministry) application forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum Vitae	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter of application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Records of achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D3 REFERENCES (do you think these provide useful information?)</b>				
Letters of reference	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone references/names of referees to contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE	LITTLE OR NO VALUE	MODERATE VALUE	GOOD VALUE
Please tick one box in each horizontal line					
<b>D4</b>	<b>INTERVIEWS (what gives better value/more objective information?)</b>				
(i)	Number:				
-	one interview only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	more than one interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	one interviewer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	two interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	more than three interviewers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tick one box in each horizontal line					
(ii)	Type:				
-	*Unstructured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Semi-structured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Situational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii)	Mode:				
-	Face to face	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	Tele-conferencing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tick one box in each horizontal line					
<b>D5</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES</b>				
-	*Personality questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Interest inventories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Literacy/numeracy tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Aptitude/ability tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Group tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-	*Work sample, job simulations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**HAVE NO  
KNOWLEDGE**

**LITTLE OR NO  
KNOWLEDGE**

**MODERATE  
VALUE**

**GOOD  
VALUE**

More than one box may be ticked

**D6 OTHER METHODS**

Please specify:

1	..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	..... .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION C**

**1 What were the key factors that influenced your decision to accept the position?**

- 1 Remuneration
- 2 Work environment
- 3 Working for the Ministry of Commerce
- 4 Job itself/job content
- 5 Other (please specify)

.....

**2 Did the interviewer/interview panel influence your decision to accept the position?**

- Yes
- No

**If yes, was the influence:**

- positive
- or negative

**What was it about the panel that influenced your decision?**

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**3 Was the job accurately portrayed in the interview (i.e. did the job turn out as you expected?)**

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*Please continue on the next page if you need to*

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**3** *(continued from previous page)*

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**4** **Do you have any other comments on the recruitment processes in the Ministry of how these may be improved?**

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**Thank you for the time that you have taken to complete this questionnaire.**

If you would like to discuss these issues further please contact Leanne Brown on 4742 624 (or extn 8624)  
Monday-Wednesday

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- aptitude/ability tests
- ability tests measure individual strengths in technical/practical areas (e.g. numerical skills or mechanical ability)
  - aptitude tests measure the potential of applicants to learn or perform in particular jobs
- biodata
- biographical information which is linked to pre-determined successful job performance factors
- critical factors
- the competencies, experience, and attributes necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the position (each factor should be weighted to reflect its relative importance)
- group tests
- usually include a combination of aptitude and ability exercises in a group setting (e.g. presentation skills). Usually part of an assessment centre
- interest inventories
- designed to measure or reflect an individual's occupational and personal interests
- literacy/numeracy tests
- ability tests specifically designed to measure literacy or numeracy ability
- personality questionnaires
- designed to measure and reflect an individual's personality traits
- realistic job preview
- information which accurately reflects the actual content of the job

- semi-structured interview - interview has some set questions to give some structure, or broad areas to be covered, but these are departed from where particular points of interest arise and are pursued
- situational interview - applicants are asked what they would do in certain circumstances. The circumstances relate directly to those of the job vacancy
- structured interview - interview is conducted using only a pre-set, agreed series of questions, so that the interview has a formal pattern or structure. The only deviation from the structure is when the applicant is asked to comment or ask questions
- traditional application forms - a standardised form requesting information from the applicant, (e.g. name, address, work experience and so on)
- unstructured interview - interview progresses as a mainly unplanned discussion
- weighted application forms - application forms which are constructed in order to get information on items rated as more significant than others in predicting an individual's success in a job
- work sample/job simulations - tests or exercises that are built on a sample job task. These tests are job relevant, for example, an advisor may be asked to complete an 'in basket' exercise where they process the contents of a typical 'in basket'.

Date

Appendix IIa

Name

Division

Location

Dear "successful recruit"

### **Review of Recruitment Practices**

Last year a questionnaire went to all managers and staff who were involved in the recruitment process in 1996. Their responses formed the basis of a report which was issued in October last year. Your name has been identified as someone who was recruited into the Ministry, or appointed to a new position in the Ministry, in 1996. Now it is time for you, as someone who was on the other side of the selection panel, to tell us what you thought of the process.

Our aim is both to understand the process more from the candidate's perspective and to improve our process both for the candidate and the Ministry. The information you provide will be treated as confidential. The information will not be presented with any identifying names or with any other information which may identify the individual who provided the information. This is because we welcome your frank comments. The information you provide will form part of a report for the Ministry and will also be used as part of a university research project.

If you have any comments, please don't hesitate to contact me on extension 8624, Monday to Wednesday.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes of your time to complete.

Leanne Brown

Senior Advisor Human Resources

*Superior ...*

# STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## COMMENTS ON CURRENT PROCESSES

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: / /

Q1 Can you briefly describe the process you follow when a vacancy occurs?

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Q2 How do you arrive at the shortlisting criteria?

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Q3 Is the shortlisting criteria usually reflected in the advertisement for the position?

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Q4 What other information is used in the advertisement?

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.....

Q5 How do you decide on which recruitment sources and methods to use (give example of each)?

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.....

Q6 Do many applicants ask for information on why they weren't shortlisted?

Yes No

Do you usually provide information to applicants on why they weren't shortlisted?

Yes No

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.....

Q7 (a) What information do you give to the candidate prior to the interview?  
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(b) Is this the same for all candidates or different for the shortlisted ones?  
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.....

Q8 a) Have you always used the same interview procedure?  Yes  No  
.....  
.....

(b) Have you found it effective?  Yes  No  
.....  
.....

Q9 (a) How do you conduct the interview? (note to interviewer: focus on interview format - structured, set questions etc)  
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.....

(b) How long does the interview usually last?  
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(c)(i) How much time is spent describing the position?  
.....

(ii) What do you describe (Note to interviewer: mundane duties, as well as more interesting ones?)  
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(d) How much time is spent learning about the applicant?  
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(e) What is your understanding of the term "realistic job" preview?

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(f) In your experience, do you believe this occurs in the Ministry?

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Q10 What do you do before you meet with the candidate?

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Q11 How do you make an assessment of the applicant through the interview?

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.....

And at the end of the interview?

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(NB Explore panel dynamics/power differentials)

Q12 (a) Have you found or do you see any limitations with using a selection interview?

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(b) Have you used any other selection method (other than the interview)?

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(c) Could you please describe?

.....  
.....

(d) How do you use the information obtained from this selection method? (Note: in addition to interview, what weighting, etc)

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(e) When and why was this method first used?

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(f) What are the advantages of this method?

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(g) Do you see any limitations with using this method?

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Yes No

Q13 Do you carry out reference checks?

(a) When and whom do you contact?

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(b) Do you contact people additional to these put forward by the candidate? Please expand.

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Q14 (a) What percentage contribution does each selection method make to the overall selection decision (including referee checks)?

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(b) After a successful applicant commences work, is any follow up done?  
If yes, what occurs?

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Q15 In 1996 you appointed \_\_\_\_\_ to the position of \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Has this person turned out as you expected them to? (Are they performing successfully in the job?) Please expand

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(b) (If not successful)  
What do you think could have happened to improve the fit? (If applicable)

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(c) (If successful)  
Do you feel that the good match between applicant and job was because of a sound selection process or for some other reason (please expand).

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Q16 Have you been involved in a selection decision where the appointed person failed to perform successfully in the job?

Yes No

If yes:

(a) What recruitment/selection methods were used?

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(b) What critical success factor(s) did the person lack? (e.g. written communication skills, interpersonal skills, fit with Ministry values, judgement, good attitude and so on)

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(c) Were these critical success factors addressed at the interview, and if so, how were they addressed?

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(d) Do you consider that the failure to make a good recruitment decision arose as a result of:

A lack of skills or training on the part of those doing the recruiting (please specify):

.....  
.....

Inadequacies in the recruitment or interview process (please specify):

.....  
.....

Failure to use the right selection methods or a wide enough range of selection methods (please specify):

.....  
.....

Some other reason (please specify):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

(e) What, in hindsight, would you have done differently in order to ensure that a good recruitment decision was made?

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## STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

### Question areas

#### 1. Information received:

*Question 1: Did you receive sufficient information about the job?*

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*Question 2: What information did you receive?*

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*Question 3: When was the information received? (in terms of the selection process)*

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Question 4: *Is the job as it was portrayed in the interview?*

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**2. Selection procedures:**

Question 5: *What procedures/methods were used? (Personality questionnaires, aptitude/ability tests, group tests, work samples, job simulations)*

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Question 5a: *In what order did they occur? (if applicable)*

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Question 6: *In the interview, did the questions appear to follow a set structure or was the interview more of a casual conversation?*

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*Question 7: Did you feel that you had the opportunity to present yourself?*

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**Process**

*Question 8: Did you feel that the selection process was fair?*

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*Question 9: Do you have any suggestions as to how we might improve the process?*

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**N.B. The information contained on this form is not to be released in its individual form, or in any way that will identify the individual who gave the information.**

# Appointment Procedures Flowchart

