

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION DECISIONS

"In nature, the answers are already  
There, we bring them out,  
by asking questions"

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### **Abstract**

*A Critical Incident (CI) on "Conflict in Recruitment and Selection Decisions", was presented to four hundred and sixty-nine (469) part-time MBA students (referred to as respondents in this paper), in Human Resources Management (HRM) examination in one University. The solutions to the CI, provided by the respondents, reinforce the divergent viewpoints on Conflict Management in Recruitment and Selection Decisions. The task to reduce the errors of rejecting candidates who would later perform successfully on-the-job (Type I errors) or accepting candidates who would subsequently perform poorly (Type II errors), is not the responsibility of the Human Resources Manager (HR Manager) alone. The conclusion is that all managers (who use people to get results), carry out some form of "human resources management functions", in their Departments or Units and their contributions to reducing conflict in recruitment and selection decisions, are vital to the success of the Human Resources Department/Division (HRD) in particular and the Organization, in general.*

### **Sources of Errors in Recruitment and Selection Decisions**

Recruitment could be defined as the *process* of discovering potential applicants for actual or anticipated vacancies. Selection is a part of

recruitment and is the *process* whereby those who are suitable for a given job are differentiated from those not suitable (Akinmayowa, 2006: 98). Similarly, Chandan (2001:170) noted, "Recruitment is the *process* of attracting qualified personnel, matching them with specific and suitable jobs and assigning them to these jobs. Its aim is to develop and maintain adequate manpower resources upon which an organization can depend, when it needs additional employees. And "selection is a *process* of choosing the right candidate from a pool of applicants (Chandan, 2001: 175). Furthermore, "this *process*, is established to achieve a good match between the job requirements and the candidate's skills and motives. A good match, results in increased productivity and quality performance. A bad match, is extremely costly to the organization due to the cost of training the candidates, the cost of mistakes made by the candidates, and the cost of replacement" (Chandan, 2011:175).

In these definitions, the word "*process*", is a "recurring decimal". Here, *process* is the series of actions taken towards achieving a particular end. The series of actions taken by human beings in organizations, are bound to be affected by the human factors. For example, in organizations where there are no clear policies on recruitment and selection, then when to recruit, how to recruit, what to

advertise, when and where to advertise could be problematic. Also, when to select candidates, what method(s) to use, who will be involved in the selection: what number and at what level, including the cost of the selection process, could be problematic.

Actually, no recruitment or selection decision could be free from *technical errors* (e.g. placing adverts in the wrong media or designing job relevant questionnaires/forms with loopholes). Also, there are *behavioural errors* (errors premeditated, e.g. revealing insider's information on jobs, to an applicant, to give him/her undue advantage over others or placing late applications in the list of applicants, against an organization's procedure/policy. Yet, *human errors* (errors not premeditated: e.g. misplacing applications/documents, missing pages in the documents of applicants), are no longer news.

Robbins (1978:101) observed that errors (technical, behavioural and human), create problems, which are potential sources of conflict in the selection process. Examples are, errors in the form of *rejecting* candidates who would later perform successfully on-the-job (Type I errors) or *accepting* those who subsequently perform poorly (Type II errors)-

Fig. 1:

		LATER JOB PERFORMANCE	
		Successful	Unsuccessful
SELECTION DECISIONS	Reject	TYPE I ERRORS	CORRECT DECISION
	Accept	CORRECT DECISION	TYPE II ERRORS

Fig. 1: Selection Decision outcomes

Source: Robbins, 1978:101

These errors, no matter what we do and how we do it, may never be eliminated, but they could be reduced, in the recruitment and selection processes. The human factors, the organizational factors and other forces, influence the steps taken, in the recruitment and selection processes and are responsible for errors. The best any person, selecting applicants for jobs, can hope to achieve, is bit by bit, to reduce the number of times, he is wrong (Akinmayowa, 2006: 103). By deduction, recruitment and selection should be a team work, for wrong decisions to be reduced, in the exercise.

**Methodology: Critical Incident (CI) Technique**

To illustrate the roles played by individuals and groups in recruitment and selection decisions, the sources of conflict and how it could be resolved, a Critical Incident (CI), was presented to 469 (four hundred and sixty-nine) part time MBA students, during an examination, in Human Resources Management (HRM), in a University. The respondents, were predominantly graduates. The majority were males and drawn from diverse background, in Nigeria.

The CI is reproduced below:

*"In one Organization, the Production Manager was invited to the office of the Chief Executive/Managing Director (CE/MD) and was given at list of employees recently recruited for deployment in the Production Department. The Production Manager was surprised, when he saw the list and told the CE/MD that although he made specific request, in writing, for the new employees, but he was not INVITED (placing emphasis on the word invited), to take part in the INTERVIEW, for the new employees. The CE/MD, gazed at the Production Manager and said:*

**'WHY SHOULD YOU BE INVITED FOR THE INTERVIEW, WHEN THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, HAS DONE HIS JOB?'**

**'How should the Production Manager respond?'**

In order not to teleguide the respondents, in the solution they would provide, the title of the CI was not written on the question paper. However, the CI is an example of a Hierarchical and Functional conflict, in the Organization. In any examination, the best any student could achieve, is to *follow examination instructions, answer the questions as they are set, provide useful answers to the questions and make a strong impression in the mind of the examiner.* On this basis, the views of the respondents to the CI, under examination conditions, may not be radically different from how they would respond, if confronted with the same problem, in real life.

### **Findings**

The solutions of the respondents to the problems in the CI, were diversified. Their solutions led to the establishment of TEN GROUPS, depending on the approaches to the problems by the respondents. *Each respondent was placed in the group which best represents, the solution which the respondent offered.* However, it should be pointed out that the solutions offered by one group, slightly overlaps, with the solutions offered by another group, in a few cases.

The percentage of respondents, in each group from a total number of 469 respondents was established. Group 1 shows the solutions to the problems in the CI, proposed by about one quarter of the respondents and Group 10, shows the solutions that was the least popular. Other different solutions, come in between Groups 1 and 10. Thus, the groups, given the number of respondents in each case, were presented in the descending order of magnitude. Eight respondents, were not allocated into any group, five wanted the interview to be cancelled and re-scheduled while three respondents, wanted the production manager, to be sacked.

### **Group 1 (113 Respondents: 24%)**

The diverse views of the respondents, were summarized. *They suggested that the Production Manager should respond as follow:*

"Having made specific request for new employees, I should have been invited for the interview, to interact with the candidates. There are some characteristics or mannerism in the candidates which I could observe, to give some ideas about their suitability for employment. The Human Resources Manager alone, should not be the sole determinant of who is fit or not fit for the job. The Human Resources Department (RHID) is a support department, for all the Human Resources in the Organization. All managers are Human Resources Managers. They appraise their staff, discipline and recommend them for promotion as at when due and so on. My experience as a Production Manager, should not be underestimated, in the conduct of interviews, for the new employees who will be deployed to work, in the Production Department".

In this response, the Production Manager would appear to be *polite and conciliatory*, in his remarks. The matter is not being *avoided or defused*. It is being confronted by *negotiation*. With negotiation, strategies, both sides in a conflict situation can "win" or be involved in a win-win situation. The "aim of negotiation is to resolve the conflict with a compromise or a solution which is mutually satisfying to all parties involved in the conflict. Negotiation, then, seems to provide the *most positive and the least negative* by products of all conflict resolution strategies" (Akinmayowa, 2005: 181).

*Now, if you are the CE/MD, how would you respond to the Production Manager?*

### **Group 2 (66 Respondents: 14%)**

"The organization should work like a family and in the family, nobody gets special treatment except those that are ill. Organizations should practice the *African Extended Family Model of Organizational Control (AEF Model)*. This model, is akin to Industrial Democracy (Participation in decision making). This should be encouraged. An organization has the potential, to carry everybody along, to achieve better results

using the AEF Model of Organizational control. A good HR Manager, will want to maintain this fact at all times and will encourage other managers, in the different functional departments, being senior managers, to contribute to selection decisions”.

*This sounds rather interesting. Do you think that the CE/MD would encourage the Production Manager to continue the discussion?*

**Group 3 (61 Respondents: 13%)**

“Appraisal of staff is day-to-day and every manager is involved so long as he/she works with people. Human errors could be minimized when the HR Manager and other managers, in the functional departments, are involved in screening employees through selection interviews. I represent the HR Manager, in the Production Department, on a daily basis and my experience counts.”

In this incident, if you are the CE/MD, how would you react,? Would you adjust yourself, on your seat? However, is the Production Manager, not stating the obvious?

**Group 4 (47 Respondents: 10%)**

*The Production Manager:* “The HR Manager may have done his job but may not have completed his job. Anyway, is he the Production Manager? Who could guarantee that the applicants recruited would be *reliable and dependable*. My roles, at the interview, should be to assist to find out the technical know how, of the applicants and how, their needs could be met in the Production Department”.

*This is like a power game: an indictment of the CE/MD? In confrontation, as a means of conflict resolution, “all the issues are brought into the open and the conflicting groups directly confronts the issues and each other in an attempt to reach a mutually satisfactory solution” (Akinmayowa, 2005: 181). The Production Manager, would appear to be using POWER, rather than NEGOTIATION,*

*as a means of confrontation here.*

**Group 5 (42 Respondents: 9%)**

“My involvement in the interview, could help to reduce the unnecessary cost of training in the Organization. This is because, the new employees, may be deficient and may have to be trained. This could be costly and time consuming”.

*This is an attempt by the Production Manager, to let the CE/MD know the cost implication of the action of the HR Manager, if it goes wrong. Could the CE/MD think that the Production Manager is trying to query his authority? Will this approach by the Production Manager, solve the problem?*

**Group 6 (38 Respondents: 8%)**

“My involvement in the interview, could narrow the gap in the human errors, which may have occurred in my absence because I am more grounded identifying the “traits”, “mannerism” or “personality attributes”, associated with production functions”.

*Courageous... but, if you are the CE/MD, would you stomach this?*

**Group 7 (33 Respondents: 7%)**

“Is the Production Manager, not having better technical understanding of the production functions? Is the production manager a novice in human resources management? No, I am not. My knowledge will be useful at the interview, to enable the panel choose those who may not necessarily be good production workers, but those who fits the job and would likely succeed in it”.

*Really, it appears that he is asking the CE/MD some questions and making the efforts to “educate” him. How many CE/MD anywhere, will be happy with this approach?*

**Group 8 (28 Respondents: 6%)**

“Who will accept the blame if those who are employed and deployed to the Production Department, fail to deliver, have accident on-the-job, misuse or destroy sensitive equipment of the company?: the HR

Manager?, the Production Manager?, or the Chief Executive? When the person not properly screened resume work with hidden agenda and with values which are different from the values, cherished by this company, whom do we blame? How are we sure that a new employee will not run away with the money, goods, and the equipment of the company or trade away sensitive information? Can we trust the new employees in the Production Department, in an age of stiff competition? The challenges, facing recruitment and selection, are enormous and cannot be solved through one man show”.

*The observation is very critical and challenging. If you are the CE/MD, would you call the HR Manager, to order? Would you ask him, some questions. Would you request the HR Manager, to speak with the Production Manager, on the issues he raised?*

**Group 9 (19 Respondents: 4%)**

“As the saying goes “No Man Is An island”. So, no Department or Unit in any Organization, is an Island. Each Department or Unit needs to interact with others, on a daily basis. The HRD provides information (input) into other Departments, and the (output) from other Departments, feed back into the HRD, to enable it find out if company policies, are working or whether, it needs to be modified or changed. So, the HRD needs other Departments especially, in selection decisions”.

**Compare the above with Group 10 (14 Respondents: 3%):**

“Even within the HRD, there is a mixture of personnel, at the different levels. The Human Resources Leader or Human Resources Manager (HRM), could be a specialist in HRM and/or a Professional HRM, affiliated to a registered Professional Group or a Consultant. There are others, who could be described as HR Generalists. This has the potential of enhancing the development of the HRD, through the tolerance of divergent opinions, at different levels of the HRD.

Other heads of Department (e.g. Finance/Accounting, Sales/Marketing, Research/Development/Quality Control, Production, Safety/Security etc), could be described as generalists, in HRM because they use people, know how to appraise them, discipline them, motivate them, know their training needs and make the necessary recommendations, when they deserve to be promoted. They cannot be sidelined when the issue of salary and wage increase, is to be discussed. Their views on productivity in each department, in the organization are vital. The Production Manager, is the Front Line Human Resources Manager, in the Production Department and should be present, at the selection interview”. **The reactions of Groups 9, 10 and the example unedited below are instructive:** An example, of the solutions to the CI, by one of the respondents, is reproduced below unedited. It provides the framework, for the information used, in establishing the ten groups in this paper. This example, is not necessarily the best. Corrections of *mistakes* in *italics* where necessary, have been made and indicated in (parenthesis). In the example, the respondent, laid a foundation for his/her answers, justify the need for the production manager's presence at the interview, was polite to the CE/MD, while emphasizing the need for managers to cooperate, to consult one another. The benefits which the HR Manager would derive, through integrating the views of the Production Manager into the interview, were discussed and without fear, suggested that the interview should be cancelled (Mowang, 2011: 1-2):

“From the given question, the Production Manager had made a list of employees he needed to fill certain positions in his department. This means he had certain qualities, qualification, experience level and other necessary attributes in mind. He happens to be on ground at the production department. He is the eye of management at that department. It could also be concluded that he knows the kind of hands he needs in

order to increase efficiency in his department”.

“From the above, one cannot help but deduce that the production manager, should be part of the selection process that will bring in new employees to his department. True the human resources manager has the ultimate say *on* (in) who and who to bring into the establishment as a whole; but such recruitment should be based on recommendations from the various departmental managers.”

“As the Production Manager, I will begin by respectfully acknowledging the duties of the human resource(s) manager. I will also agree that division of labour *was* (is) necessary for the smooth running of the organization. However, I will bring to the notice of the MD/CE the fact that our *rites* (rights) as managers in the company are not isolated. There are definite but overlapping boundaries. The managers exist to *compliment* (complement) one another. The duties of the human resource(s) manager is to see to the human personnel input and output of the company. The CE/MD should be made to understand that for the health of the company, the human resource(s) manager must consult with the other managers when taking decisions concerning their departments”.

“As the Production Manager, there are certain parts of the general production process that need specific categories of people to operate. He will know what to ask during the interview in order to get the best personnel. An outspoken, agile looking person may not be conversant with the intricacies of machineries used in the production department”.

“A company functions well as an African family unit. A good human resource(s) manager will want to maintain this fact at all times. In the light of this and for the overall benefit of the company, I will humbly request that the interview be conducted again in *other* (order) that round pegs will be put in round holes”.

*Could the CE/MD fault these arguments? Is it not obvious that, those who use people to get results, in organizations, are by virtue of their roles, knowledgeable in the fundamentals of Human Resources Management and should be encouraged to use this knowledge to move the organization forward?*

The diversity in human nature is both a challenge and an opportunity. There would be divergent views. There would be extreme views and difficult questions may be asked. They should be seen, as an opportunity for self-examination, for growth and development because without criticism, there may be no progress. When the CE/MD of an organization, is open to new knowledge, is humble and is a good listener, he or she would benefit from the suggestions of others, avoid using the power vested in his/her office, to deal with conflict.

Indeed, five respondents, suggested that the Production Manager, should demand that the interview results should be cancelled and another interview constituted *with the Production Manager*, in attendance. And three respondents, went beyond the mandate given by the examination and suggested that the *Production Manager, should be sacked because of his confrontation with the CE/MD*. *No respondent* suggested that the Production manager should resign.

Whereas in developed economies, some managers might resign their jobs as a result of being schemed out in decision making, this scenario was not supported by this study. Also, it should be stated that, there was no way we would have known the *reactions* of the CE/MD to the *reactions* of the Production Manager, in the approach adopted in this paper. In future studies, the responses of the groups, in another CI, could be presented to the CE/MD, to find out how he/she would respond.

### **Conclusion**

This CI technique of analyzing the problems, presented in this paper, has been more helpful

than the use of questionnaire. Without the examination, it is not likely that the respondents would give the quality of attention, they gave to the CI, in a research questionnaire. Therefore, more studies, like the one reported in this paper, should be encouraged. In this study, the solutions provided in the CI, could be helpful in solving real life problems. Ideally, the approach is to examine, the diverse solutions offered by different individuals and groups, to consider the options which suit the situation for solving the problem(s) and apply it.

We have seen from the reactions of the respondents, that the processes of interviewing potential applicants for jobs, could be problematic. This is an example of *Hierarchical* and *Functional* conflict, in recruitment and selection decisions. There is conflict between the *Production Manager* and the *CE/MD* (Hierarchy) and between the production and HR Managers (Functions). Also, this incident has shown that there could be conflict between the *CE/MD* and the *HR Manager* and the recruitment and selection policy of the organization, may change.

The responses of the various groups, reported in this paper, show that the sources of errors in recruitment and selection decisions are profoundly affected by the human factors. Now, we know why it is vital for a manager, in a functional department, to take part in interviewing those that will be deployed to his/her department. The consequences, when organizations, scheme out the department(s) in the process of recruiting/interviewing new employees, to be deployed on-the-job in the same department(s), cannot be underestimated. There is the burden of paying enormous costs, replacing employees who are unable to perform. And there are the human costs of repairing the damage, which the marginalization of one manager may cause, in decision making, in the organization.

Nevertheless, we should not be afraid of conflict, because in any social system (and the organization in an example of a social

system), the needs of one individual or group are bound to contradict the needs of another individual or group. So, conflict is inevitable. Accordingly, "the credible choice before us, is that we must all continue to explore the relevant options, available in theory, research and practice, to find the ideal methods of reducing conflict, to the level at which, it could be managed successfully, whenever and wherever it occurs" (Akinmayowa, 2005:183).

*Finally, if conflict in whatever form, at whatever level, anywhere, anytime, creates the opportunities for asking questions, it is the right step in the right direction, because, in nature, the answers are already there, we bring them out, by asking questions.*

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