

***DECISION MAKING
IN
RECRUITMENT/SELECTION***

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X or Y, or Maybe Z?

The process of selection from among alternatives may be either systematic and rational, or intuitive and emotive. Emotive decisions are those based on "I like...", and may fly in the face of evidence that the choice is inappropriate.

We've all experienced this. Rational decisions are those which are made against structured criteria, often quantitatively.

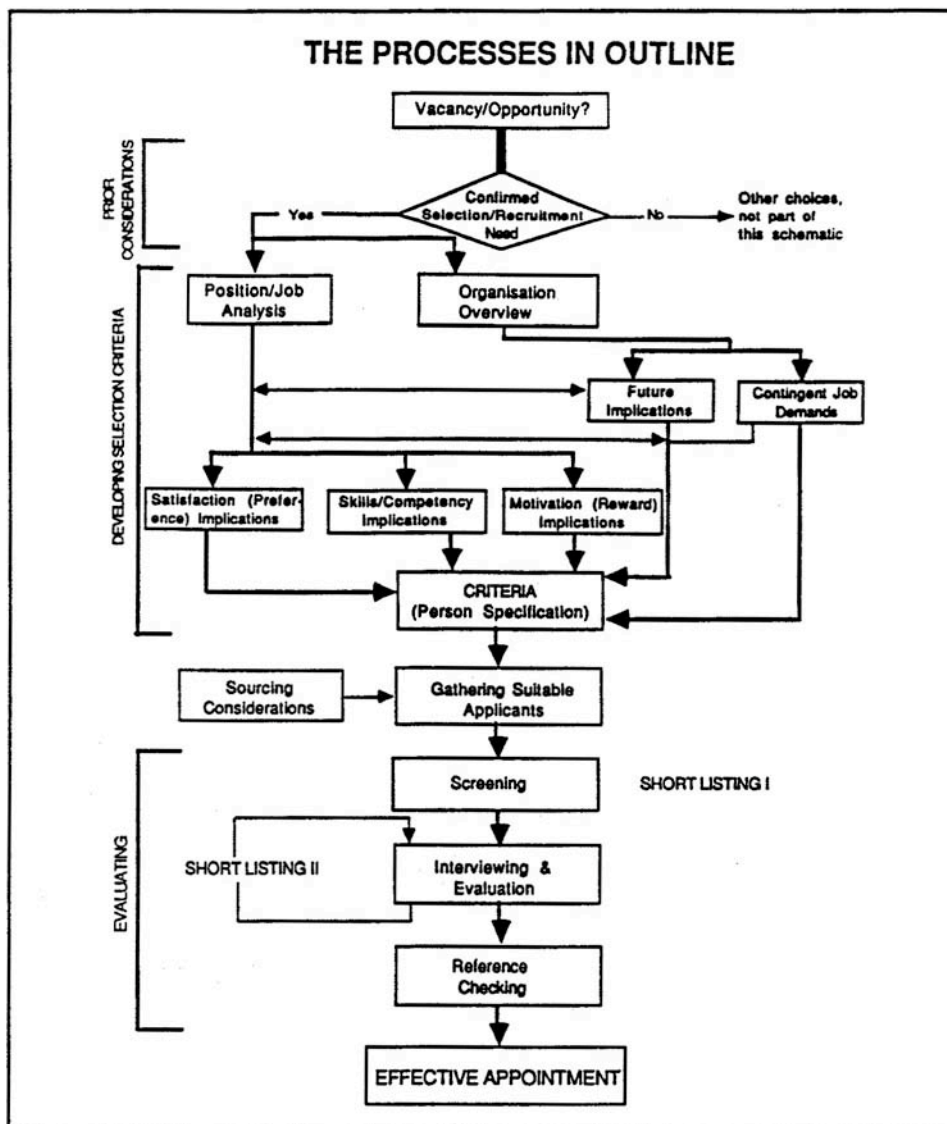
Most selection and recruitment decision systems seem to fall into three broad camps:

- **Those that are unashamedly intuitive and emotive.** "I hired him 'cause I like him".
- **Those that are overtly systematic and rational, and maintain objectivity as an intent.** These are often characterised by selection panels, with open publication of criteria. (But, of course, the panel members are human).
- **Those that are superficially systematic and rational, but are apparently intuitive (although often defended as objective).**

It is probably impossible to eliminate the intuitive "self" from any decision making, but certainly difficult to minimise its influence in people selection. Yet good recruiters certainly seem to follow clear decision processes, whether consciously or unconsciously.

In the following pages, the apparent processes of overtly systematic and objective selection/recruitment decisions are presented in a procedure-like way. But while this is a convenient way to present material, it is unlikely the process works that way with very many people. Each of us probably applies similar processes but in a somewhat more dynamic or flexible way. We may minimise our intuitive "self", but can't eliminate that vital part of each of us.

The overall processes of decision-making in selection/recruitment are summarised in the schematic on the next page.

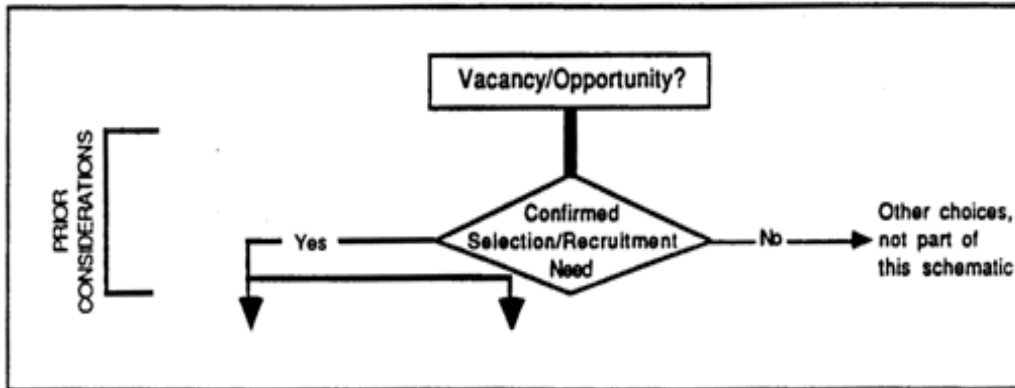


This schematic suggests the following clear stages (where → means "leading to"):

1. PRIOR CONSIDERATIONS → DECISION PURPOSE
2. POSITION ANALYSIS/ORGANISATION OVERVIEW → DESCRIPTION OF CRITERIA
3. CANDIDATE SOURCING → APPLICATION OF CRITERIA.

The notes which follow are thus divided into three sections, as per the above.

Prior Considerations → Decision Purpose



Too often, recruitment and/or selection difficulties result from **unplanned response recruiting**... there's a vacancy, and we ought to fill it!

Similarly, **opportunity recruiting** can cause complications and pain... he/she's an exceptional person, and we should hire him or her (even though we don't have quite the position at this time)!

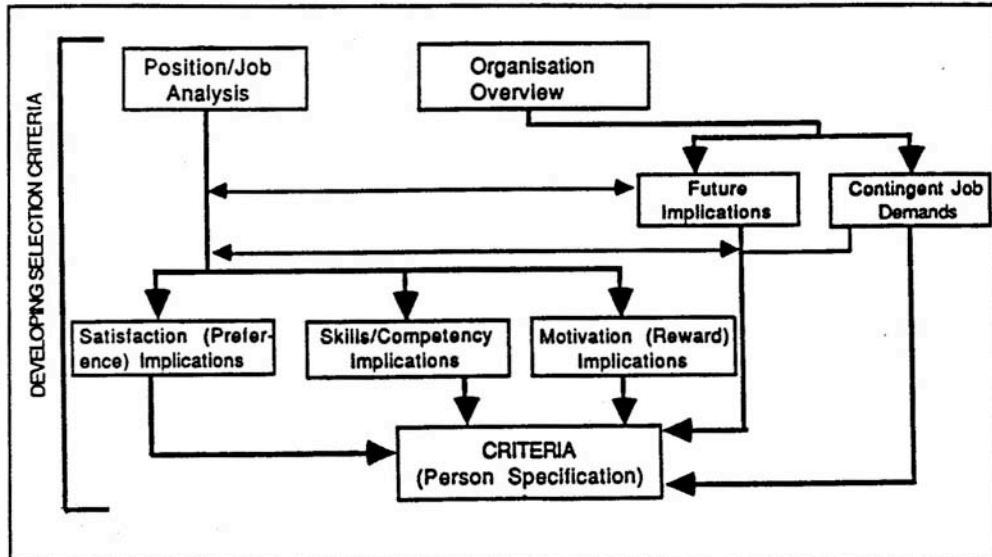
Unplanned response and opportunity recruiting often follow from a failure to stop and look at valid alternatives to recruitment and selection.

Sometimes, selection is compromised by **guilt** ("Mary missed the last promotion chance, so should be our first choice this time") or inappropriate **reward** ("Jack's been here so long; it's time we moved him up").

Good recruitment tries to follow the purposeful, rational process. It is opposed to unplanned response recruitment, opportunity recruitment, guilt or reward selection. It starts with prior considerations being thoroughly reviewed to ensure we consider options; for example the decision to select a salesperson may, of course, be preceded by several other decisions, each with a different range of alternatives. How to best structure for fixed coverage? Should we have our own representative, or agent, or what? These may need to be decided before we finally look at individuals.

These Prior Considerations must be answered to ensure a clear statement of decision purpose. An example is: To select a new salesperson for territory X.

Position Analysis/Organisation Overview → Description of Criteria



1. Position/Job Analysis

Job Analyses techniques are many and varied, but in the main they are completed on an activity basis...how much time is spent on each activity in the job. They typically reveal three main criteria factors. These are:

- i. **Skills/Competency Implications...** job analysis can reveal the necessary skills/knowledge which must be demonstrated in the job. Usually, criteria from skills/competency implications are worded from BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE so as to provide evidence by previous demonstration of the necessary skills/knowledge. This is possibly the most difficult source area for selection criteria. Why? Because too often we depend on it too much.

For example, it's not too difficult to imagine a stated criterion of "maximum experience". But does this mean 20 years of doing the same thing? And is 20 years of doing the same thing 20 times better or worse than doing 20 different things in 5 years, and knowing which seemed best in that situation?

Similarly, almost every recruiter is quick to spell out minimum formal educational achievement. Frequently, such recruiters when pushed by the question "why?" respond with answers such as "evidence of the ability to learn", or "credibility with customers", or something similar. But surely there is other evidence of the ability to learn, and whoever heard a customer ask a company representative what his/her academic qualifications are?

Despite the warnings, background and experience do impose serious criteria. When formulating these, it is usual to consider, relevant to the position, the following:

- Minimum education standard, or other evidence of conceptual ability.
- Previous experience -length, specificity, general relevance, breadth, etc.

ii. ***Satisfaction (Preference) Implications...*** be wary here, as in selection criteria, satisfaction predictors provide one criterion only. And this can be affected by Future Implications (see later); possibly, the future positions to which this position leads may require different profiles. (For full coverage here, see references page)

iii. ***Motivation (Reward) Implications...***the significance of an individual's motives are clearly seen as an indication of what "switches them on". The relationship to work should be obvious; some work rewards ("switches on" different people, and each person has a relatively unique profile.

Many potential motives can be known from observation of behaviour or by careful questioning. Some of the more common to be alert to, and the more visible are:

Achievement - the achievement motive seems to be a very basic one in human beings. Persons with high Achievement (motive) tend to be results oriented - they like to see the end-product, to get frequent factual feedback. Different individuals have different achievement concepts. To some, it is a concept of failure avoidance, while to others it is attainment. The differences are

probably the result of early reward (value) learning.

"High achievers" will take moderate risks in situations that depend on their own ability, have self-confidence, like responsibility and prefer concrete knowledge of work results. Related to the achievement motive is the level of aspiration. People with high achievement need generally have high aspiration levels for challenging tasks, but not for routine tasks.

Affiliation - the affiliative motive is the need to draw near to other people, or to interact enjoyably and positively with them. People with strong affiliative motives are "people-oriented" rather than "task-oriented". Clearly, jobs differ in the content of reward they provide, intrinsically, relative to the affiliation motive.

Power - some people have a high power motive, the need to persuade and control others, to prevail. Such individuals spend much time concerned with how to obtain and exercise power. But this is not all negative. There seems to be an immature form of the power motive (concern for control for control's sake, concern for the symbols of power). There seems to be also a mature form of power; power needed/used to help others. Such individuals may well have a parallel high affiliation motive. Status is part of the symbols of power for many people.

In setting criteria, consideration of reward patterns in a particular job would seem to make sense. For example, most sales positions provide an opportunity to meet with and talk with others frequently, clearly quite rewarding for someone with a strong affiliative motive.

2. Organisation Overview.

Even an informal scan of the environment in which the job will exist should reveal the following:

i. ***Future Implications***

Do you want the person you're now recruiting as a salesperson (for example), to later be a potential sales Manager? If so, how quickly? Or, do you see the organisation or relevant technology changing significantly in the near future? This can be particularly important when looking at preference profiles. Consider this: Isn't ambition one form of job dissatisfaction?

Considering the future can provide essential selection criteria. Don't stop with what has been...move on to what might be!

ii. Contingent Job Demands

Preferred preference profiles can be considered as implicit job demands. But there are job demands which are more tangible, and are really contingent phenomena...they only affect the applicant if he or she accepts the job. But they're real, and many impose criteria. For example, any (or all) of the following might lead to a specific criterion:

- Travel requirements...where, how often?
- Location of appointment...desirable/undesirable; is removal involved?
- Salary range
- Benefit limitations
- Undesirable working environment
- Calls upon "private time"
- Social representation of the company.

Within the conditional aspects of a position, phenomena such as appearance and general company standards, which often appear in criteria lists despite the obvious subjectivity involved, can sometimes be handled.

3. Description of the Criteria

It's important to word for clarity and specificity, as others may be using your criteria list. Whenever possible, the criteria should be measurable...but this is not always possible. Criteria for selection are clearly a specification of the ideal candidate, and typically come from:

Specification of the Job, to include

- i. Skills/Knowledge Implications
- ii. Satisfaction (Preference) Implications
- iii. Motivation (Reward) Implications.

Future Implications

Contingent Job Demands.

For a salesperson example, some criteria might be:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Experience
&
Background | 1. Must have at least 2 years sales experience (any industry). |
| | 2. Maximum industry-specific sales experience (i.e. as much as possible). |
| | 3. Maximum education in relevant areas. |
| | 4. At least School Certificate level. |
| Contingent
Job
Demand | 5. Must be available by June 1. |
| | 6. Ready to start ASAP. |

Clearly, this example is missing Preference, Motivation and Future Implications, but you will note here that two kinds of criteria are visible; those which are absolute (**MUST** be available by June 1), and those which provide a base for comparison ('**MAXIMUM** industry-specific sales experience'; 'Ready to start **ASAP**').

An absolute criterion is a non-negotiable limit. If you have only \$30,000 for salary, you can't spend more. Mandatory, absolute criteria perform a function of excluding candidates. People who don't come up to the limit fall out of the evaluation process. Such limits must be realistic, or you could be excluding potentially desirable candidates. Absolute criteria should be easily measurable; you don't want to exclude someone on a "maybe" basis.

A comparative criterion is relative and negotiable. It can be more or less satisfactorily met.

Note the following:

- I. Absolute criteria are not more important than comparative criteria; they simply do a different job.
- II. Criteria can be contradictory. Each time you want the best possible results or the best possible quality at the lowest possible price you are probably involved in such a contradiction. But there's nothing wrong with this, and a good candidate may just satisfy both.
- III. Often one element from Job Analysis and Organisation Overview will yield both absolute and comparative criteria. For example, you might conceivably have \$30,000 for salary (all you've got available), but want to spend as little as possible.
- IV. Most selection decisions have many absolute criteria, but don't ignore comparative opportunities.
- V. Criteria should be discrete, and single. If two tend to say the same thing, combine them. If one criterion seems to say two things, separate it.
- VI. Do not be totally afraid of subjective criteria. Possibly you can sum such things up in a single one...e.g. acceptable to the Sales Manager, or something similar.
- VII. Criteria (whenever possible) should be able to be objectively measured, and emphasise what a candidate should HAVE rather than should BE.

CRITERIA	COMMENT
Should be intelligent	This is more a "should BE" than a "should HAVE". Try and re-state it as something that can be measured more easily from the candidate's past (e.g. success in an education program).
Good looking, hard working	How will you judge these? The first is purely subjective. The second is invisible...and may even stay that way after you've hired him or her!

To make criteria more useful, and to admit to the **relative importance** of criteria, many recruiters will use a weighting system. Absolute criteria are obviously equally important, and thus cannot be weighted. Comparative criteria are not necessarily equally important.

To show relative importance:

- a 1-10 base is convenient. Use 10 for the most important, and assign relative values to the others.
- you obviously may have more than one criterion with the same weight, including more than one "10".

Acknowledging the two kinds of criteria, and the opportunity to show relative importance, the example on page 8 might become:

Absolutes:

At least 2 years sales experience (any industry).

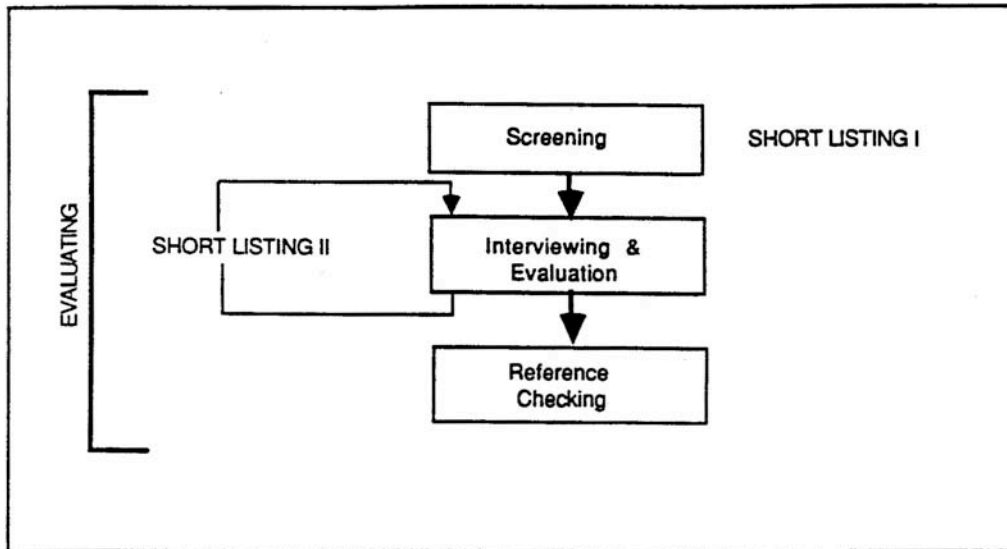
At least School Certificate.

Available by June 1.

Comparative:

	W
Maximum industry-specific sales experience	10
Maximum relevant education	6
Ready to start ASAP	3

Candidate Sourcing, Application of Criteria



Sourcing of candidates is a specialty area, and is not covered here. Clearly you can advertise, or employ an agency, or use referral systems.

But once you have a list of candidates and a criteria list ("person specification"), you are facing the core of decision-making. This stage seems to break down into four major substeps:

- (a) Initial screening
- (b) Second screening
- (c) Listing information
- (d) Comparing for Tentative Choice

but (b) and (c) overlap, as they usually involve interviewing.

a) Initial Screening

In the interview process it is desirable to see as many good applicants as possible to widen the choice. More time is available for this purpose if unsuitable candidates are eliminated prior to interview. This is often called "short listing", but is really the first of two opportunities to reduce the list.

In the initial screening process, Absolute Criteria may provide early and easy screening from written or even telephone applications. For example:

- Education standard (under-qualified or over-qualified).
- Past employment (does it disclose the background required; does it show stable employment, or, if not, do reasons for job changes appear rational; is he or she currently employed or, if not, why not; does job history go back far enough to give an adequate basis for judgement; if salary expectations are indicated, are they reasonable in relation to the range?)

Enter specific data against each absolute criterion to assess if you have valid candidates. For those who do not meet the limits, no further collection of information, nor effort, is required. Beware of being overly rigid about screening out candidates who come very close to a limit of one of your absolute criteria. Use common sense.

b) Second Screening

The second screening differs from the first screening by the use of Comparative Criteria. While the telephone interview may be useful here, it is still primarily a chance to eliminate rather than evaluate. But some recruiters do use an interview opportunity for this second screening, as the interview does permit a better opportunity to pursue comparative criteria.

c) Listing Information

For each candidate who passes the screening, you will need specific information that supports how well he or she fits or meets each comparative criterion. Be careful that you record information not judgements (e.g. good, poor, etc.). Write the information in; you may have to explain your selection to someone else, or new candidates may come up later.

Make a note (e.g. an asterisk) on information which is assumptive or from doubtful sources. This is an area for potential risk, and should be looked at again (in a later step). But at this stage, if it's the best available, it's what you must record.

The interview is the vital mechanism for collecting this information.

d) Comparing for Tentative Choice(s)

Remember at this stage that you are assessing a particular piece of information, NOT the total candidate.

If you have good information, you can score the extent to which the candidate meets the criteria by handling each criterion separately. Give the "best fit" information (against a specific criterion) a score of, say, 10. (The 1-10 scale is simple and convenient). To get a "10", it doesn't have to be a "good" alternative, just the best information listed. Score information on other candidates relative to the best on the 1-10 scale.

If you've scored, you can multiply the scores by the weighting of the respective criterion. This transfers the weights into your scoring procedure. (If you've not scored, it's a little more difficult to transfer the weightings into the comparison, but people do. We can't provide an easy method, as we would tend to always score).

The multiplied score/weights can be added, with the highest total being your tentative choice. Remember, these number systems are often based on rough estimates. Don't accept them blindly.

A sample work sheet is included with these notes.

Tentative choice includes the idea of "short listing", (at least the second stage of this). This usually means that 2 or 3 candidates are seen as "good" fits with the criteria, and that this short list is interviewed by a second person (or panel) to provide differentiation.

Once you've made a tentative choice from using the criteria list at the interviews, you must consider any risks involved in hiring this person. Risk is a dual concept.

Crossing a big city street in peak hours can be risky; there's a high probability of being hit by a car, they are travelling much faster and if you are hit, you'll probably be hurt. Risk involves both the concept of probability and the concept of seriousness.

For the candidates your evaluation suggests you might be tempted to go for, you should look at the risks. You don't want surprises later. But consider probability separately from apparent seriousness.

Check previous employment (conduct a "reference check"). This is as simple as a 'phone call, with clear questioning. But do make sure you have the candidates okay to your enquiries.

Making a selection involves both the concept of "fit" (what you established with the comparison/evaluation of each candidate against the criteria) and the concept of "comfort" (what you establish in the risk analysis).

What's comfortable for one is uncomfortable for another. Each manager has a different level of risk acceptance; there's no black-and-white rule to follow.

It's like buying a pair of shoes. The right size is important, but who wants a pair that is too heavy or too conspicuous? They'd only be uncomfortable. We buy shoes that fit, and that are comfortable for us. Hire people with at least as much care as buying a pair of shoes!

