



Driving team performance



A lack of a strategic and competitive recruitment process often sees organisations miss out on finding the right people. Apodi's Tony Swift examines what companies can do to drive improved performance through excellence in team recruitment.

It is unfortunate but the majority of companies do not measure the impact their recruitment processes have on performance. This may well explain why, in many companies, the establishment of a world-class recruitment process is not seen as a strategic imperative.

However, there is overwhelming evidence that recruitment processes are critical in helping companies achieve the performance they need to deliver success. Very few companies measure the effects of recruitment, but those that do, quote improvements in productivity of between 25% and 600% when recruiting a top performer over an average one.

In some sectors, such as sport, it is immediately obvious the effect that good recruitment has on a team's performance. Even in companies who deploy standard recruitment processes, key executives will acknowledge that recruitment is strategically important and yet will often do little to change the situation.

Extensive research on performance, such as Jim Collins's *Good to Great*, expresses the view that getting the right people is a more important factor on performance than any other key process in the business.

Senior executives in most companies

are driven by similar agendas and these often include the following key issues; that budgets are tight and the need to control costs, driving performance, and finding the best people.

All of the above make sense but, when we examine what these companies are actually doing to find the best people, we are struck by the fact that:

- Their recruitment processes are very similar
- These processes make it a challenge to find the best people, and
- Few companies have established world-class recruitment processes as a strategic imperative.

So, whilst the evidence is clear that excellent recruitment can drive performance and that companies want to employ the best people, very few companies are actually doing what it takes to establish world-class recruitment processes to actually make this happen.

Recruitment – a strategic must

Companies with world-class recruitment processes have all firstly established that these are of strategic importance. Then they have implemented most, if not all, of the following elements:

- A business case has been made to, and accepted by, senior management and other

stakeholders that great recruitment is a fundamental necessity

- To aggressively seek out the best recruits, rather than implement a traditional and rather benign recruitment process
- The goals of the recruitment function will include:
 - The recruitment department will be managed as an industry-leading strategic function
 - The company aims to dominate the talent market in the industry
 - The recruitment function aims to build the pre-eminent talent acquisition department in the industry
 - The recruitment function aims to be agile, responsive to demand and cost effective.
- In terms of importance, the leader of the recruitment function will be at least equal to the executive leaders of other core business departments, and
- The success or otherwise of the department will be measurable and visible.

Clearly, some of these elements will depend on the size of the organisation but, even for smaller organisations that might not be able to dominate their

industry, these goals can be realigned but still be part of a strategic thrust.

For example, in English football the recruitment market has been dominated for several years by just a few clubs – Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea and, latterly, Manchester City. There is clearly no way that a team in the lower divisions can compete with these clubs. But they can establish superb recruitment processes to compete effectively with similar clubs and move forward as a result.

I was involved with Bath Rugby Club when it was on a journey to world-class performance. It always out-recruited its immediate competitors, improved performance and moved to the next level until it reached the point where it could attract the very best and dominate the recruitment market. During this journey, recruitment was always viewed as strategically important and central to the club's ambitions.

The holistic approach

To secure the best people a holistic approach should be taken to recruitment that encompasses the following:

- The offer – why a candidate will want to join the company
- The recruitment process itself
- Performance management, development and motivation.

Whilst many firms state they want to attract the best people, they actually deploy very similar recruitment processes to their competitors. Companies adopting 'me too' recruitment strategies cannot expect dramatic improvements in performance. This can only come from doing things differently and better, and benchmarking processes and practices with the very best in the industry.

Initially, the offer has to be sufficiently attractive to persuade people to join the company. Management must then identify any mistakes made – hiring mistakes can always happen – and then ensure that top quality people are developed, motivated and treated appropriately. It is a prerequisite that to maximise performance, each of these elements are implemented successfully.

The average solution

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A case study: A primary care sales team. Most sales teams are recruited in the same way. A salary package is developed, comparable with the competitors in the market. Preferred recruitment consultants provide candidates from their databases at the time. Interviews and assessment centres are used to choose the best candidates. Occasionally, internal candidates are available for interview and bounty schemes are sometimes introduced to encourage existing staff to recommend people from their own networks. The process is usually managed by HR with input from sales managers, and the whole procedure is normally 'off the radar' of senior management who never receive appropriate metrics assessing the effectiveness of their organisation's recruitment.

The world-class solution

At first glance you may say that there is not much wrong with the average process. It is Apodi's view that such an approach, rather than guaranteeing companies will attract the best, more often than not, ensures that they will not.

Here are some of the characteristics of world-class recruitment processes that companies must adopt if they are to attract the best and drive performance:

The offer: the offer itself has to attract the best. The constituent parts of the offer can include the package, additional benefits, the culture, line management and so on. These have to be better than those offered by competitors and often should be customised to the individual candidate. Of course, some companies simply do not have the resources to recruit the best for every position. Therefore, it is important to prioritise those positions that will have the most impact on performance and focus recruitment resources on these.

Recruit top talent from rivals: most companies tend to rely solely on third-party agencies to identify candidates for them. Unfortunately, the number of top performers on the databases of agencies is often low. Such people tend to be coveted by their existing employers and need to be enticed away. Direct poaching is an aggressive recruitment strategy, but it is extremely important if you want to attract the best.

Continuous recruiting and workforce planning: turning recruitment off and on like a tap is ultimately ineffective. Companies need to continually plan for

changes in the workforce and constantly be monitoring the market to identify who and where the top performers are. Recruitment is a continuous process that should operate independently of short term revenue fluctuations.

Respect the recruitment department: in sport, recruiters and scouts are a critical part of the management team. In films and theatre, the casting manager is held in high regard. In both sport and the arts, senior management takes a huge interest in who is being recruited to the team and know how important their recruiters are. Sadly, in many businesses this just isn't the case.

Integrate recruitment and performance management: even companies with strong recruitment processes can still fail to drive the company to the required performance levels. Mistakes may still be made, although these will be fewer if the recruitment processes are effective. Companies should assume a percentage of failure in recruitment and ensure that performance management identifies inappropriate hires and replaces them rapidly with new outstanding recruits.

Unfortunately, some companies allow poor performing individuals to remain in a position for too long, which can have a catastrophic impact on performance, particularly if they are in important roles.

Assess for talent and attitude

first – competencies second: whilst experience can play an important part in succeeding within a role, talent and attitude are non negotiable attributes that all successful candidates must have. Unfortunately very few assessment processes are set up to identify the talents required for the role and whether individual candidates actually have those talents.

Recruit proven performers: top sporting organisations always look for proven performers. Even the youngsters they recruit have already excelled at their age group and have displayed the talents required to fulfil the role. It is extremely risky to rely on training to develop skills.

These are just some of the characteristics of great recruitment practice, although unfortunately they are not always evident in an organisation.

Quick Read

- The majority of companies surprisingly neglect the importance of their recruitment process
- Effective recruitment can vastly improve performance when appointing top performers
- To be successful in recruiting the right people, organisations must first focus on an unrivalled system in place then seek out the right candidate
- Even smaller organisations can compete effectively when recruiting against competitors – a world-class system will always attract candidates
- An holistic approach should always be used to attract new employees
- Companies should avoid using standard recruitment techniques and processes and implement and include factors that will generate the best results
- Mistakes happen, but by getting the backing of senior management, creating and training a recruitment team, establishing world-class recruitment, and developing key metrics to measure new processes will increase the chance of choosing the right candidate.

From average upwards

Apodi has developed a model to transform recruitment processes that drive performance within organisations. This model is a step-by-step approach which all companies can follow and show rapid improvements.

The model includes:

- Obtaining senior management buy in
- Establishing and training the recruitment team
- Establishing simple but world-class recruitment, performance management and performance development processes, and
- Developing key metrics to measure the success of the new processes.

As with most things in business there is no magic ingredient. But success depends on the superb execution of relatively simple processes that transform performance beyond the capabilities of competitors and into something truly special.

Tony Swift is the Managing Director of Apodi.