

Recruitment: the role of the manager

KEY WORDS

- » Advertising
- » Desirable criteria
- » Essential criteria
- » Job description
- » Person specification
- » Recruitment
- » Vacancy

This paper is the first in a series of three about recruiting and retaining staff. It will consider in a stepwise fashion the processes and procedures a manager might go through before they decide to advertise for a new member of staff. In this first paper we will consider primary issues such as what is the role to be filled, and what might go into the job description and the person specification. In the next two papers, we will move on to consider the process and practice of shortlisting, and examine good practice for interviewing. We will also consider what a good induction looks like and how we might work to retain staff.

One of the biggest errors a potential employer can make is to fail to think about where the gaps are in their team and what they should be advertising for. What work needs doing, and who is needed to do it? For example there is a world of difference between a receptionist and a back office administrator both in terms of what they do for the team and the skills and attributes required to fulfil the role.

Another common error is to try to recruit someone who knows the role exactly. This is a waste of time — they probably don't exist. Since all workplaces operate differently, looking for someone who has many if not all of the requisite skills, but who also fits the values and current makeup of the team may be more beneficial. Developing someone into a role — the 'placement approach' — is often better than recruiting someone whose personality and skills don't gel with wider team or organisation but whom we nonetheless think might be able to do the job very well from day one (Scott, Gill and Crowhurst, 2008).

Taking the time to think through this element of the recruitment process means the manager will be advertising the right role in the right place, and has a better chance of getting the right person into post. 'Values based recruitment' is an increasingly used term, equally relevant when recruiting students to nursing schools and universities and within the NHS (NHS Employers nd)

Before advertising for a new role or existing vacancy, the manager needs to ask two

interrelated questions: why has the vacancy arisen, and what do we need from the candidate both now and in the future? Failure to ask these questions may make the rest of the process both difficult and potentially fruitless.

WHY HAS THE VACANCY ARISEN?

Some vacancies arise because an individual has left to work elsewhere. If the person has left for positive reasons such as a promotion, for family reasons, or to relocate, then the manager can be content that the workplace itself is not a factor in that person's decision. If, on the other hand, someone has left the team because they are unhappy at work, feel unfulfilled or because of issues with other team members, the manager will need to consider how to avoid a similar outcome in the future.

Undertaking an exit interview with staff before they leave is as much part of the recruitment process as the interview for the new post itself. The use of exit interviews is a good way for the manager to gain an understanding of the workplace culture and is an important source of criticism, both positive and negative which can be used to drive team growth and development (businessballs.com, nd).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS ROLE?

On most occasions, when a person leaves a team the temptation is to replace like with like rather than to review what it is that the team needs at that moment in time from the new employee. When a

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Box 1. Key questions

- What did the person do that we will miss as a team?
- What did they not do/what can the new appointment do that would benefit the team?
- Having answered these first two questions, do we already know what the main functions of the vacant role are, or should we stop and take stock?
- Do we need the role to be full time?
- Do we have an adequate job description for what we need or do we need to rethink it?

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vacancy arises or is created, there is an opportunity to consider some important questions (*Box 1*).

Just because a role has been filled in one way in the past does not mean that replacing like for like will stand the team in good stead for the future. This requires the manager to consider, not only current but also the future needs of the team. For example the increasing use of technology suggests that paper-based administration skills will be less valuable than computer skills in the future.

Many people become experts not only in what they do but also where they work. Trying to replace Jean who has 30 years' experience in the team with another Jean will only lead to disappointment, as the expectation is unrealistic. Internal promotion may be the right answer where what is needed is a degree of organisational memory (Dunham and Burt, 2011). In many respects internal promotion can be very motivating — both for the promoted staff member and for others working in the organisation who see that opportunities are available within the team for people who work hard. Self-development and the opportunity for advancement has long been associated with motivation for employees (Herzberg, 1968).

THE JOB DESCRIPTION AND PERSON SPECIFICATION

Rather than just relying on the existing job description — unless this is a generalist one — it is a good idea for the manager to review this in line with requirements before going out to advert. There are some basic elements that absolutely must be included when writing a job description. These include:

- ▶▶ The job title
- ▶▶ Where the job is based
- ▶▶ The person/s the job holder will be responsible for and accountable to
- ▶▶ A clear outline of the key tasks that make up the role
- ▶▶ A prioritised list of responsibilities
- ▶▶ A list of the key people the role links to (stakeholders)
- ▶▶ How long the advertised position is for, i.e. in the case of a fixed-term or temporary contract.

Structuring the list of responsibilities means that the person applying for the role is clear about

what the priorities are. It should also be clearly stated somewhere that the specified list of tasks and responsibilities is not exhaustive and that the post holder may be asked to do additional things as identified as reasonable by their manager from time to time.

As well as the job description — which as the name implies is about the job — it is good practice to also write a person specification. The purpose of the person specification is to identify the sort of training, skills, knowledge and attributes the manager is looking for. It is good practice to identify which of these elements are essential and which are simply desirable, and if the successful candidate will be required to undertake any training.

For the potential applicant the person specification is a good means of working out if they are the kind of person the organisation is looking for and if the job is a good fit for them. It can also help to spell out what skills they need to enhance or if it might be valuable to undertake any training to enhance their career prospects.

Generally speaking it is important that the person specification is unambiguous. A trained nurse may not appear to be the same to some people as a registered nurse, for example. Placing absolute 'must haves' at the start of the person specification identifies to the prospective candidate what the organisational priorities are.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights that there is significant work to do before placing a job advert. We have identified that the manager needs to be alert to the possibility that a person may have left because of an organisational issue. Employing someone into an impossible role, or into a team which is hard to work with, may create as many problems as it solves. We have seen that as well as considering required skills and training, the manager also needs to examine the attitudes and values of an applicant. We have also identified that the job description and person specification need to be structured to allow potential employees to understand both the requirements of the job, and what skills and experience are needed for a successful application. In the next paper in this series, we will unpick the process of shortlisting and consider further the role of values in the recruitment process.