An Evaluation of Challenges Relating to Recruitment and Selection Processes in the Robben Island Museum

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Abstract: The study evaluated challenges concerning recruitment and selection processes in the Robben Island Museum. The implementation of the recruitment and selection practices is crucial in order for the organisation to fill the right positions with the right people who are experienced, competent, skilled and knowledgeable. In other words, organisations should strive for excellence in ensuring that there is compliance with legal pre-scripts whenever the recruitment and selection of employees commence. A qualitative research methodology was applied in order to achieve the primary aim of this paper in which case semi-structured interviews were used. Further, another data collection technique that was utilised to collect relevant information is official document study. A total sample of fourteen (14) purposefully selected participants, namely seven operational staff members and seven managers were chosen for interviews. Collected data was analysed through qualitative content analysis. The major findings indicate that the Robben Island Museum experience several recruitment and selection challenges, which include nepotism, cronyism and favouritism. The findings reveal that although qualifications are seen to be necessary during recruitment and selection processes but do not seem to be seriously considered as part of the selection criteria. This study identified some inconsistencies and failure to adhere to the recruitment and selection policy during recruitment and selection processes. Therefore, the Robben Island Museum should consider prioritising a review of current recruitment and selection policy in order to address ongoing challenges thereof.

Keywords: Employment candidates, Interview, Recruitment, Selection, Screening

1. Introduction

Recruitment and selection involves a deliberate effort to fill vacancies with appropriately qualified individuals in a timely fashion in order to meet the organisation's strategic objective (Vance & Paik, 2015). Further, Vance and Paik (2015) assert that recruitment not only involves bringing new people into the organisation but from a broader perspective, recruitment also encompasses the many activities related to moving employees into, through and out of an organisation in the pursuit of satisfying work demand and meeting organisational objectives. This statement is constant with Louw's (2007) definition of recruitment as the process of generating a pool of capable candidates applying to an organisation for employment. In today's hypercompetitive business environment, employees are a source of competitive advantage. It is unquestionably critical for organisations to appoint the right people, with the right skills, the right knowledge and the right attributes, at the right time and for the right jobs (Chungyalpa & Karishma, 2016).

Adu-Darkoh (2014) asserts that the outcomes of an effective recruitment process is the reduction of labour turnover, good employee morale and improved organisation performance. It is therefore equally important for every organisation to recruit qualified and competent candidates in order to maintain its sustainability. Applicants with experience and qualifications most closely related to job specifications may eventually be selected. Karthiga, Karthi and Balaishwarya (2015) state that capable candidates who meet the requirements of the positions for which they are applying, are first shortlisted. Organisations become concerned when the cost of a mistake in recruitment is high. The aim is to obtain, at a minimum cost, the number of suitable and qualified candidates to satisfy the needs of the organisation. An organisation attracts candidates by means of identifying, evaluating and using the most appropriate sources of applicants (Louw, 2007). Despite the importance of recruiting and selecting competent and qualified candidates for positions, the Robben Island Museum has to contend with allegations to unfair recruitment and selection processes, which

include nepotism (National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate challenges pertaining to recruitment and selection processes in the Robben Island Museum.

2. Recruitment and Selection Processes

The recruitment process is the first step in the employment process, and lays the foundation for the selection process (Mashaba, 2013). It is therefore sensible to provide detailed information to the human resource team in order to commence with the recruitment process. The human resource team usually should be in a position to create a shortlist of candidates to be interviewed immediately after checking their curriculum vitae (CV). Equally important, the interview panel should consist of human resource team members whose role is to identify suitable job candidates who are fit for the job. It is crucial to ensure that job applicants satisfy the organisational expectations and be able to reflect the culture of the business. Nevertheless, most recruitment and selection processes have elements of biased judgement. Therefore, treating job applicants in a professional and positive manner is likely to leave them, with a positive impression about the organisation, particularly concerning the manner in which selection processes are handled (Saviour, Kofi, Yao & Kafui, 2016).

Recruitment and selection process has become one of the key processes determinants of the success of an organisation. Over a period of time organisations have moved from product focus to market focus, from selling focus to customer focus and to employee focus. It has become common that organisations place more premium on human resources as their biggest organisational assets. Indeed, the capabilities of an organisation fall upon the shoulders of its human capital. In fact, an organisation is only as good as the capabilities of its employees (Chungyalpa & Karishma 2016). Benedict (2012) emphasises that success can no longer be measured only by the amount of money an organisation has generated. Further, Pearsall (2016) adds that through attracting and appointing the correct talent with the required skills in the current and future vacancies, organisations are able to operationalise organisational strategies.

Richardson (n.d) asserts that successful recruitment begins with appropriate employment planning and forecasting. During the recruitment process, an organisation formulates plans to fill or eliminate future job openings based on an analysis of future needs, talent available within and outside of the organisation, and the current and anticipated resources that can be expended to attract and retain such talent. Erasmus, Swanepoel, Schenk, Van der Westhuizen and Wessels (2005) outline thirteen recruitment steps processes as follows:

- an exact need for filling the post should be considered;

- budget approval is imperative to ensure that there is funding to fill the vacant post;

- equally important is the approval from senior management to ensure that recruitment is aligned with the overall institutional strategy;

- compilation of the job description and specification is crucial;

- KPAs of the job should be determined;

- in order to get an indication of whether recruitment should be conducted internally or externally, the recruitment policy and procedure should be conducted;

- a proper source should be selected depending on the position to be filled;

- the best method of recruitment should be chosen without the exclusion of other;

- decision of the preferred recruitment method should be implemented, and time that should be allowed for responses should be stated;

- screen responses should be determined according to the criteria set for the job;

- an initial shortlist of candidates should be drawn up;

- applicants (both unsuccessful and those interviewed) should be advised of outcomes; and

- inviting qualifying applicants for interviews.

According to Erasmus *et al.* (2005), a recruitment policy should stipulate broad guidelines for the way

in which public sector institutions ought to deal with recruitment and selection processes. In other words, the recruitment policy should indicate the position of the institution concerning the general objectives of recruitment and the principle of equal job opportunities in recruitment and selection. Moreover, Stredwick (2014) adds that recruitment policy should clearly indicate that the appointment of successful applicants is to be undertaken without discrimination. This implies thoroughness in processing of job applications, consideration of internal applicants if they satisfy the requirements of the job, and meticulously shortlist job candidates.

Van der Westhuizen, Wessels, Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Schenk (2011) postulate that a recruitment and selection policy should at least be able to comply with legal prescriptions on issues relating to fairness and discrimination. For instance, legislation - such as the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, seek to protect the interests of employees during the recruitment and selection processes. Besides, recruitment and selection must be conducted within the budgetary constraints without negating the, urgency of filling vacancies (Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2011). Bute (2011) reveals that in organisations where nepotism and favouritism is prevalent, the human resources departments find it extremely difficult to perform their functions with integrity. Moreover, nepotism and cronyism could create negatively affect the work environment resulting in poor morale, poor organisation commitment, and poor job satisfaction and performance (Fu, 2015). In this regard, Louw (2007) posits that government departments and agencies ought to implement anti-nepotism policies in order to prevent the employment of close relatives, especially the placement of such candidates in the same department or work groups.

According to Richardson (n.d:4-5), documenting the organisation's policy on recruitment, exercise in recruitment and selection processes. This could contribute to or satisfies the requirement of procedural transparency and leave a trail that could be followed easily for audit purposes when necessary. According to Saviour *et al.* (2016), a policy that emphasise internal recruitment and selection appears to be superior or unique in comparison to a policy that adopts external recruitment methods because it permits an organisation to pursue individual development or advancement in a sustainable manner. By so doing, deserving employees may be able to advance in their

jobs, which suggests that they are likely to be given first consideration when vacancies arise.

It is probably the objective of most organisations to recruit and select qualified and competent job candidates who would stay with the organisation much longer, but this seems not to be the case. Some new appointees tend to leave shortly after their appointment due to a number of reasons, for example, inability to adapt to the organisational culture. In this regard, Nabi, Wei, Husheng, Shabbir, Altaf and Zhao (2014) assert that organisational politics affect the employee's reaction, and it is found that in the public sector organisations, employees prefer silence by showing negligent behaviour when overwhelmed by politics around them, in particular when quitting the job is not an option. In fact, politicians make public employment hard by both 'bashing the bureaucracy and starving it of resources needed for high-quality recruitment (such as pay and adequately signing bonuses for hard-to-fill classifications) (Berman, Bowman, West, & Van Wart, 2018). Moreover, it seems employment in the South African public service institutions is based on patronage. At the same time, patronage positions are therefore among the most influential in government. Most of senior positions are supposed to be allocated based strictly on technical merit and competence, but unfortunately, the influence of political office bearers or personal factors negatively affect recruitment and selection processes. Although there are policies in place, personal factors cannot be discounted (Berman *et al.,* 2018).

According to Yaseen (2015), an organisation has to see different issues while recruiting an applicant and make a rational decision that there should be free from any biasness or corruption in the process because it could damage the reputation of the organisation. Yaseen (2015) maintains that procedurally, equal employment opportunities should be applied to all without any form of discrimination on the basis of race, age, deficiency, military jobs, complexion, religion, sex, pregnancy and national language. In other words, complaints relating to unfair discrimination during recruitment and selection could be avoided if an organisation complies with legislative provisions. According to Fu (2015) ethics play a significant role in organisations and should be sustained to enhance attainment of workplace justice and professionalism. Nabi *et al.* (2014:15) suggests that researchers should focus on the political and ethical aspects of the recruitment and selection practices rather than

look into the economic and technical aspects. Another issue facing organisations is the unavailability of objective system for assessing which applicant is 'best qualified' for the job. Although merit systems within public sector institutions and agencies are designed to achieve an objective process, it would be difficult to create a system free from human influence.

3. Methodology and Procedures

This study relied primarily on a qualitative research methodology, because it would assist in obtaining the views of employees concerning the challenges associated with recruitment and selection processes. To be more specific, a qualitative case study research was undertaken. This study used semi-structured interviews for the purpose of collecting data. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to give all interviewees the same interview questions (Reynolds, 2011). Moreover, this study made use of non-probability, purposive sampling to select the Robben Island Museum officials in the executive, lower, middle and senior-level positions. According to Maxwell (2013), with purposive sampling, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is relevant to the researcher's questions and goals, and that cannot be obtained from other choices. The sample was fourteen (14) participants, purposefully selected. The participants were assured of anonymity. Since this research was conducted within a single organisation, only a few relevant people involved in the recruitment process, thus, both recruiters and employees were interviewed. For instance, the senior human resource managers, recruitment officers and the employee relations specialists were selected based on their direct involvement in the recruitment and selection policy design and implementation. Data collected through semi-structured interviews was analysed through qualitative content analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of empirical data revealed a number of challenges pertaining to the recruitment and selection processes in the Robben Island Museum which are identified and discussed hereunder.

4.1 Cronyism, Nepotism and Favouritism for Positions

The findings of this study indicate that some participants raised complaints about cronyism and nepotism in the Robben Island Museum. This issue seems to be problematic despite the fact the recruitment and selection policy of the Robben Island Museum specifically state that requirements for positions should not be relaxed in an endeavour to accommodate unqualified family members and close associates (Robben Island Museum, 2010). Moreover, the participants expressed concerns regarding the preferential treatment of external job applicants over internal job applicants. Some of the participants articulated their views as follows:

"Robben Island Museum prefers employees from outside compared to internal employees even if they are qualified for advertised positions. In most cases the people recruited are said to have a relationship with someone influential. Therefore, selection of candidates based on merit is minimal" (Operational staff member 2).

"In all our interviews, a panel is chosen wisely and we have a declaration form that is completed by all panel members stating that they are in anyhow not related nor have a relationship with any candidate coming for an interview. During the interview all panel members singularly rate candidates from a score of 1-5 and after the candidate has left the panel share their scores and a consensus score is reached" (Manager 7).

"For the sake of "fairness" advertising of posts is circulated internally just to say internal processes have been followed and exhausted and there are no proper candidates. This happens 99,9% of the time when RIM is looking for suitable candidates. If random survey had to be conducted on RIM recruitment, results will show that almost 85% of the employees hired in the past 15 years are external. The method used by RIM HR and its recruitment unit which is not fully capacitated to perform in accordance to the best practice on recruitment has compromised the organisation. Secondly, it has marginalised some employees who are skilled and qualified to add value in the organisation, individuals who are passionate about success of RIM. Understanding recruitment and selection process from the academic point of view I can safely say RIM's recruitment is driven by corruption misuse of power from those who make decisions on recruiting and selecting of candidates" (Operational staff member 3).

These findings are in consonant with Bute's (2011) assertion that when organisations fail to consider

the education, experience, knowledge and skills of employment candidates as criteria, the success of the organisation could be easily compromised. According to Fu (2015), once cronyism and nepotism have infiltrated an organisation, recruitment and selection processes are no longer based on merits and qualifications. Further, nepotism can create a feeling of resentment which could be coupled with frustrations and hostility in the workplace (Larkin, 2016). However, concerning the problems associated with nepotism, cronyism and favouritism, some participants expressed views that the Robben Island Museum does take precautionary measures in order to prevent unprocedural appointments.

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> *"An indemnity form is completed by the panel members ensuring that there's no conflict of interest, the candidates are not friends or related, to ensure that recruitment process is fair and live up to the RIM's values of integrity" (Operational staff member 4).*

4.2 Absence of Transparency and Fairness During Selection Process

The findings indicate that trade union representatives are not fully recognised and invited to interviews as part of the selection process at the Robben Island Museum. In other words, union representatives are not invited during interviews in order to ensure that the process is fair and transparent. Some participants articulated concerns about lack of representation from trade union during interviews as follows:

> *"Sadly the union is not involved in any of these processes and that is not fair, more specially for the positions that are in the bargaining" (Operational staff member 3).*

> *"Checks and balances are not in place when it comes to the selection process. The process is left to individual managers who can influence the*

process. The union is not even part of the interviews to ensure that there is fairness. The interview panel does not represent all stakeholders as indicated. The union as a stakeholder, must be involved … in the process to see that it is fair and transparent" (Operational staff member 2).*

Transparency is necessary to increase levels of fairness and minimisation of bias during recruitment and selection processes. However, Van den Brink, Benschop and Jansen (2010:1461) hold a view that "bias is more likely to occur if assessments are based on obscure criteria and where the evaluation process is kept confidential." In this regard, perhaps it would be prudent to ensure that unions be afforded reasonable access to applications received to verify the correctness of the master list information. As a matter of fact, the Recruitment and Selection Policy of the Robben Island Museum clearly state that "trade union representatives can only attend interviews when candidates for posts fall within their bargaining units" (Robben Island Museum, 2010:458). In other words, if the job candidates fall outside the bargaining unit of a trade union, the representatives of trade unions are not invited to interviews.

Although some of the participants lamented the exclusion of trade union representatives during interviews, there were also few participants who held a view that the trade union representatives played an active role during selection. Perhaps these contradictions could be attributed to the personal experiences and perceptions of individual employees concerning recruitment and selection processes, which could be partial or impartial. Notably, the participants had this to about the role of union representatives:

> *"To ensure fairness, all interviews are done without fear, favour or prejudice. The union as a social partner observe the fairness and consistency of questions by the panel. All panelist including observers are required to disclose their interests or relationship before the process commence. Interviews are recorded manually and digitally and records may be referred or revisited whenever there is a complain, grievance or dispute" (Manager 1).*

> *"Human Resources Department must frequently engage with the unions on these issues. Staff members must participate/be involved in reviewing recruitment policies" (Manager 2).*

With regard to the issue of transparency, concerns were not only limited to the matters discussed above, but the aspect of disclosing the salary range for advertised positions was raised.

> *"I believe for any job you advertise, the organisation should provide the salary range so as to attract candidates who are willing to be in that bracket. It also assists with transparency and reduces animosity" (Operational staff member 6).*

4.3 Invalid and Unreliable Personnel Selection Techniques

The Recruitment and Selection Policy of the Robben Island Museum shows that psychometric tests, competency tests and health tests could be used in the selection of job candidates to the extent that the law permits (Robben Island Museum, 2010). With regard to the selection tests, the research participants revealed that personnel selection techniques used by the Robben Island Museum are invalid and unreliable. Nevertheless, personnel selection techniques have to stand the test of time in terms of their validity. In fact, validity denotes that the test should measure what it purports to measure and should provide consistent results (Van der Westhuizen *et al.,* 2011). Moreover, validity is separated into two distinct categories, namely: content and construct validity. Content validity refers to the extent to which the content of a selection procedure is representative of important aspects of job performance. Construct validity refers to the extent to which a selection criterion measures the degree to which job candidates have identifiable characteristics determined to be important for successful job performance (Byars & Rue, 2011). Findings of this study indicate that some of the participants questioned the validity and reliability of personnel selection techniques. Below are the views that were expressed by some of participants.

> *"Validity of the selection technique is questionable, but [the] technique can be reliable when the process is transparent" (Operational staff member 2).*

> *"RIM's selection is not valid and not even close to being reliable" (Operational staff member 3).*

> *"It is difficult to say that they are valid to an extent that a lot of it depends on how well the chosen candidate performs. Validity and reliability could be questioned if critical processes such as psychometric tests are not conducted" (Manager 5).*

> *"Questions are repetitive and less technical" (Manager 4).*

The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 requires that the selection instruments should be scientifically shown to be reliable, objective and valid (Van der Westhuizen *et al.,* 2011). Equally important, valid employment tests are a great tool to predict who will be successful on the job (Bogatova, 2017). Concerning the employment assessment practices at the Robben Island Museum during selection processes, some participants indicated the significance of assessing behavioural and technical competencies of job applicants.

> *"The limitations thus far have been the lack of practical testing of candidates. There is an urgent need to integrate the behavioural and technical element of assessment with practical tests to determine the best suitable candidate" (Manager 1).*

> *"Other tests like numerical skills and the ability to solve problems can be done apart from verbal interviews" (Manager 6).*

4.4 Less Recognition of Tertiary Qualifications

Reicheinberg (2016) argues that finding qualified employees is the most challenging aspect of recruitment and selection process, particularly, in the public sector institutions. While the assertion by Reicheinberg (2016) can be sustained as legitimate and valid, it emerged from the findings of this study that although tertiary qualifications are specified by the Robben Island Museum when positions are advertised but it appears that they are less considered during selection processes. In this regard, some participant expresses their thoughts as follows:

> *"Tertiary qualifications count for nothing in this organization; these are cited for compliance purposes. Firstly, some individuals are employed without proper qualifications for the positions they are currently occupying, this then compromise the quality of the output on productivity. Individuals who cannot think critically, who cannot think strategically and who even lack execution at operational level. Secondly, other individuals have the required qualifications but they cannot perform their duties as they lack experience" (Operational staff member 3).*

"Most managers would prefer not to employ someone who is more qualified than them, this is unethical though" (Manager 2).

"Qualifications are a prerequisite depending on the position being advertised, if it is deemed that minimum requirement is needed for a specific position, minimum qualification for the particular position will be stated in the advert" (Manager 6).

"The lowest qualification that any candidate applying for a vacancy at RIM must have acquired is a National Diploma" (Manager 7).

4.5 Unclear Process of Authenticating Qualifications

Brody (2010) highlights the importance of qualification checks with relevant institutions because it is not uncommon for job applicants to falsify their academic credentials or qualifications. Further, Brody (2010) states that when conducting background checks, it is essential to ensure accuracy since high profile individuals are often found to have misrepresented their achievements. Despite the importance of qualifications checks, some of the research participants have expressed mixed reactions in respect of qualifications checks at the Robben Island Museum. In fact, it is unclear what processes and procedures are followed to verify qualifications of job candidates.

"Candidates are required to submit proof of their qualifications. I am not aware whether these are sent for verification" (Manager 4).

"We make use of an external verification authority to very information about the candidate" (Manager 5).

4.6 Preferential Treatment of External Job Applicants

Contrary to the findings of this study, Devaro (2016) posit that it is common for organisations to make use of external and internal recruitment processes although they are inclined to giving preference to internal recruitment methods. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case at the Robben Island Museum because research participants complain about the fact that external candidates are given preference when positions are advertised. Moreover, this suggests that there is a contradiction between what the recruitment and selection policy say and what is

happening in practice. In this regard, the Recruitment and Selection Policy of the Robben Island Museum indicates that all vacancies are first advertised internally for a period of seven days and the external recruitment methods are applied when no suitable candidates could be found internally (Robben Island Museum, 2010). In line with the findings of this study, DeNisi and Griffin (2016) assert that applying external recruitment methods could have some negative ramifications for an organisation because current employee may tend to feel that they are being deliberately overlooked for higher vacant positions while external candidates are being preferred despite being less qualified and experienced. Indeed, lack of advancement opportunities within an organisation can create frustration for current employees. Some participants made the following remarks:

"Most of the times candidates complain of the selection techniques. Workers have the necessary experience and qualifications and in most cases they have acted in those positions. Robben Island Museum appoints candidates from outside who have less experience and must be taught by the very employees who are ignored" (Operational staff member 2).

"There is lack of internal promotion system. At times, the organisation seem to focus on filling vacancies with just bodies, not people with the necessary core-competencies of that post" (Operational staff member 5).

"Some employees became staff members without any interview process having been conducted" (Operational staff member 4).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that the Robben Island Museum is experiencing numerous challenges in relation to its recruitment and selection processes. Firstly, the findings reveal that cronyism, nepotism and favouritism for positions is rife, which suggest that friends and relatives of senior personnel responsible for recruitment and selection are given undue preference for advertised vacancies. Secondly, the absence of transparency and fairness during selection process is another matter of concern because employees are of view that union representatives should be invited to interviews in order to observe the processes, thereby improving transparency and fairness. Thirdly, the findings suggest that the personnel

selection tools used by the Robben Island Museum are invalid and unreliable personnel. In other words, the personnel selection techniques are incorrectly applied to test competencies not related to the advertised vacancies. Fourthly, there is less recognition of tertiary qualifications in respect of advertised positions although the reasons for such an observation are unclear. Fifthly, the findings show some degree of uncertainty regarding the processes and procedure followed at the Robben Island Museum to verify the qualifications of job candidates. This could place an organisation in a precarious situation whereby reprobate individuals can take advantage and submit fraudulent qualifications where vacancies are advertised. Lastly, the external job applicants are given preference over internal job applicants despite the fact that the recruitment and selection policy provides for exhausting internal recruitment processes.

Based on the finding outlined above, it is important for the Robben Island Museum to consider reviewing its recruitment and selection policy in order to rectify the shortcomings associated with the current policy. By so doing, the organisation would be able to work on the issue of transparency in relation to recruitment processes thereby addressing the scourge of nepotism, cronyism and favouritism. At the same time, review the policy could offer the organisation an opportunity to improve its selection tools by making sure that they are valid, reliable and legally compliant. The Robben Island Museum need to ensure that clear processed and procedure are established to verify qualifications of successful job applicants. Equally, important, the Robben Island Museum should strive to ensure that internal candidates who are competent, skilled, knowledgeable and qualified are considered for advertised positions. The findings of this study could be useful to researchers, recruitment officers and managers in the Robben Island Museum and beyond. However, it is worth noting the finding of this study are based on a small sample, which suggest that these findings cannot be generalised beyond the Robben Island Museum but could be transferrable to similar contexts.

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