CHAPTER 3

Recruitment

From Passive Posting to Social Media Networking

Your recruiting process should say to the candidate, “How’d you like to be part of our community, do neat things together, grow individually and with your peers?”

—Tom Peters

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

• identify the key paradoxes and challenges in recruitment from an organizational viewpoint,
• explain the steps in the civil service staffing process,
• pose preliminary questions such as whether to hire internally or externally and whether to duplicate the previous recruitment process or to restructure the position,
• write a customized job announcement,
• spot the strengths and weaknesses of various strategies and be able to determine an effective mix for specific staffing situations,
• describe some of the “do’s and don’ts” of the recruitment process from an applicant’s standpoint, and enhance it with effective networking skills, and
• incorporate tactics for enhancing diversity.

Having examined human resource management’s context and challenges—the civil service heritage and the legal environment—we now explore the essential functions of human resource management, beginning with recruitment, arguably the most important function of all. From an applicant’s perspective, recruitment is often daunting and esoteric. Ultimately, it can be life changing, as the applicant must navigate through what is sometimes a bewildering variety of procedures. From the organization’s perspective, recruitment is a
process of soliciting the most talented and motivated applicants, and as such it is a bedrock function. Only with highly skilled staff—human capital—do organizations have the opportunity to thrive in an era in which work tends to be complex, customized, and rapidly changing. This chapter, then, discusses an array of concerns that agencies and applicants encounter and explains why the public sector confronts unique challenges.

One paradox is that procurement strategies and techniques, despite their importance, may seem relatively insignificant compared with the American sociopolitical environment within which this function takes place. That is, three cultural forces—the historical recruitment philosophy, the social status of public employment, and political leadership—form a powerful context within which government seeks employees. Historically, recruitment has been passive; until the 1950s, it was not legal for the federal government to advertise in newspapers. Recruitment has also been highly negative and legalistic, often “turning off” would-be job applicants and contributing to the perception of excessive red tape (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [U.S. MSPB], 2000). Furthermore, the loss of prestige of the public service from its high-water mark in the 1930s and 1940s is a constant concern (Lewis & Frank, 2002). Finally, politicians may make public employment harder by both “bashing the bureaucracy” (which they are in charge of) and starving it of resources needed for high-quality recruitment (such as pay and adequate signing bonuses for hard-to-fill classifications). Critique of public sector employment, its salaries, and its pensions has become particularly pronounced since the Great Recession of 2008.

For the job seeker, another stark paradox is the seeming abundance of employment opportunities but scarcity of desirable positions (or fast-track positions). There are several reasons for this. Not only is there a tendency to increase the span of control and eliminate whole layers of middle management, there is also a propensity to reduce the number of specialists who have management rank and perquisites; as a result, positions with attractive professional opportunities can easily elicit scores of qualified candidates.

Applicants also often are perplexed by the mixed messages. Is recruitment a politically neutral, skill-based process, as it purports to be, or is it frequently a personalistic, “underground” hiring system with “wired” jobs subject to subtle, modern-day patronage? As discussed below, the public service was once largely based on patronage; even today, patronage positions are among the most influential in government. The bulk of those senior positions, however, are supposed to be based strictly on technical merit; nonetheless, the influence of “political” or personal factors is common. Below the policy level, however, personal factors cannot be discounted. Local government has always prided itself on a balanced approach using technical merit and a “good fit with the organization.” Even at the federal level, entry-level job applicants hear about a job more frequently from friends and relatives than from any other source (U.S. MSPB, 2008a), and internal promotions are affected by personal factors (U.S. MSPB, 2001). Thus, paradoxically, depending on the position, both perspectives can be true, and the wise applicant is open to the dualistic nature of recruiting—that is, luck, “fit,” and connections are often as important as competence.

In addition, should management aspirants prepare themselves as specialists or as generalists? Paradoxically, the answer is sometimes “yes.” That is, applicants for better positions must be both. Until recently, the American tradition has largely favored specialists.
The best caseworkers in social service agencies would often be promoted to supervisors, the best engineers in transportation agencies would be appointed as managers, and good researchers in state universities would become administrators. Advanced positions seldom required either generalist management training or experience in rotational assignments to gain broad experience. Although organizations seem to appreciate generalist training, it is usually on top of specialist training—for those few who are advanced in today’s flatter hierarchies. Generalist training, however, is critical for managers who deal with diverse functions and who rarely have the time to maintain specialist expertise.

Paradoxes and challenges also exist from an organizational perspective. They start with the notion that recruitment is the most compelling human resource function, but it is generally acknowledged to be the weakest in most organizations (U. S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2003). It is pivotal because if recruitment is done poorly, then all subsequent human resource functions will be negatively affected. It is often weakest because when done properly, it is a time-consuming, expensive process that busy administrators may try to circumvent. A challenge, given the contemporary demand for well-paying jobs, is that staffing practices may not consistently produce “the best and the brightest.” Perceptions of lower pay and lower job quality haunt the public sector even though those perceptions are often empirically untrue (U.S. MSPB, 2008b). Therefore, recruitment must not depend on pay comparability, which sometimes outstrips regional pay in rural areas but rarely keeps pace in urban and executive positions. Best-practice organizations, however, realize that success in a competitive environment cannot occur without first starting with entrepreneurial recruitment practices, such as better hiring efficiency and test flexibility (Lavigna, 2002), as is afforded through the use of the Internet in disseminating information and gathering and evaluating applicant data (Kauffman & Robb, 2003).

Another challenge is the focus of recruitment: should it be on current skills or future potential? Traditionally, procuring personnel emphasized technical skills and longevity. More and more, however, organizations are interested in employee potential. The ability to adapt to new responsibilities and positions is critical as agencies reorganize and decentralize decision making. Detecting future ability and identifying flexible employees takes a staffing process that seeks a different set of skills than was commonly the case in the past (Redman & Mathews, 1997).

Next is the paradox of balancing competing values: the need for timely recruitment—generally the biggest single concern of applicants and hiring supervisors alike—while maintaining lengthy processes in the name of fairness and openness. Although on-the-spot hiring occurs in government (see noncompetitive recruitment strategies below), months can elapse between the job (position) announcement and an offer of employment (U. S. GAO, 2003).

Another paradox is what to emphasize in the recruitment process. Which of the following are most significant: (1) knowledge, skills, and abilities; (2) motivation; (3) diversity and broad representation of minority and protected classes in the workforce; or (4) loyalty? Certainly technical skills are important, but it is quite possible to hire an employee who is well qualified yet who is poorly motivated, contributes to a racial or gender imbalance, and is not loyal. Nontechnical emphases have several challenges as well. Motivation is hard to
predict, often fading dramatically after the probationary period or in the year just before retirement, although certainly nothing can transform a workplace more than energetic employees. Diversity has an important management and ethical dimension, although it is rarely allowed to be more than a “plus” factor in recruiting. Organizations that lack employee loyalty likely lack trust, innovation, or dedication as well. Similarly, there is the dilemma of whether to use open recruitment, which encourages a broader pool and fresh ideas, or closed recruitment limited to the organization, which rewards service and loyalty. Closed recruitment is also generally faster.

Finally, what responsibility does the organization have to the applicant? Job seekers spend a great deal of energy and time on the process. For example, is it ethical to use open recruitment to fulfill a perceived legal requirement when a candidate, usually internal, has implicitly been selected for the position? Sham recruitment processes are infuriating for the candidate and a drain on the resources of the organization. Is it fair to ask for job references in the initial job application process when only those of the most highly ranked candidates will be read?

Such paradoxes illustrate the rich and complex factors that go into a seemingly simple process. Although there are few definitive answers across all situations, an examination of context and proven recruitment principles does lead to numerous best practices, which will be discussed in this chapter. The chapter first identifies the overarching factors affecting recruiting success and then introduces specific steps in the recruitment process. Then, three steps—planning and approval, position announcements, and recruitment strategies—are probed in more detail. Additional discussions include recruitment and diversity, the division of recruitment responsibilities, and job seeker advice. The chapter closes with a summary and concluding recommendations.

FACTORS IN RECRUITMENT: EMPLOYER AND APPLICANT PERSPECTIVES

Recruitment can be seen from two perspectives. What are the factors that affect success for the organization? And, just as important, what are applicants’ perspectives on what a quality process is, even if they are not selected?

High-Quality Recruitment: An Employer’s Perspective

At least five major elements influence the effectiveness of recruitment: (1) the breadth and quality of the process, (2) the size of the labor pool and the location of jobs, (3) pay and benefits (discussed in Chapters 7 and 8), (4) job quality, and (5) organizational image.

Having a sound recruitment philosophy means asking the right and wise questions from the outset (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Is the entire procedure well conceived so that it fully embodies vital organization goals? Are enough—and the correct—strategies used to reach a broad range of those who might be qualified and interested? Is the process aggressive enough to encourage the best candidates to apply? Is it clear and nonbureaucratic so that would-be employees will not be discouraged? Is the process free from legal challenges yet not
excessively legalistic or stultifying? Do applicants feel good about the recruitment process? Finally, is the overall procedure cost-effective for the position being considered and the recruitment environment, both of which vary enormously (U.S. GAO, 2008a)? The bulk of this chapter is devoted to this pragmatic element: providing an excellent recruitment process.

Although the size of the labor pool and the location of jobs, pay and benefits, job quality, and organizational image are not emphasized in this chapter, they have influence on the context within which the technical process operates. Labor pool size and job location play a role in recruitment (Smith, 2000). For instance, in the last generation, thousands of public sector jobs have been privatized, with the result that they have gone to private domestic and overseas contractors. Economic boom or bust cycles also affect recruitment. For school districts, for example, this means that sometimes human resource offices may be inundated with high-quality candidates. In times of shortages, though, districts may travel out of state to job fairs and offer signing bonuses and moving allowances to fill vacancies. Good economic times generally mean that few professionals of all types—lawyers, accountants, doctors, engineers, and others—may be available to apply for an open position; when the economy is weak, employee supply expands to the advantage of employers.

Pay and benefits are often the first factor that potential applicants review and consider. Public sector pay generally varies from being uncompetitive to moderately competitive, depending on the agency, location, and position. Public sector benefits (especially pension and medical insurance) are generally perceived as on par with to substantially better than the private sector on average and thus a recruiting strength. The nonprofit sector often suffers from a substantially lower pay scale and more limited benefits than either the private or public sectors, and thus must make up for these weaknesses in the intrinsic job quality elements.

Job quality may or may not be an element that applicants are immediately aware of, but top candidates invariably become proficient analysts of the organization they are considering. The best ones investigate with a critical eye such aspects as job security, advancement potential, interesting work, working conditions, and professional perquisites such as travel and training. For example, in a recent survey of federal employment, the most important factors that influenced those accepting employment were job security (28%), advancement opportunities (12%), and challenging and interesting work (10%), with only 10% identifying pay as the key factor (U.S. MSPB, 2008a, p. 37). Although much of the candidate’s understanding of job quality is sought and verified in the selection process (Chapter 4), it begins with recruitment. Challenging and interesting work leads among factors in the nonprofit sector (Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton, & Hurrell, 2008).

Finally, organizational status plays a significant role (Gatehouse, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993). Being an auditor in a social service agency beleaguered with a series of child protective service and welfare scandals may not be as appealing as working as an auditor in a large accounting firm. When the pay differential is factored in as well, it means that one organization may have Ivy League graduates competing for interviews, whereas the other does not. Laudable as the public service ethic may be, it can wear people out if agencies do not contribute to employee welfare in important ways.

To illustrate, although most public defender offices pay poorly and overwork assistant public defenders, some have fine candidates because the training afforded is excellent and
the work is as exciting as it is challenging. Furthermore, because of a short-term surge in
popularity of a strong service ethic after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, interest in public
employment increased (Kauffman, 2004). Also, there has been increased attention on
polishing agencies’ images, called branding, which is often done in tandem with recruiting
(Bailes, 2002; Davidson, Lepeak, & Newman, 2007). A related trend is organizational
ranking, such as The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government data, which highlights
top agencies by size, improvement, class, demographics, and so on (Partnership for Public
Service, 2007).

High-Quality Recruitment: An Applicant’s Perspective

According to recruitment expert Sara Rynes (1993), too often employers neglect to think of
the applicant’s perspective in the recruitment process. Instead of candidates being
impressed by the organization whether they are hired or not, most feel resentment because
of cold, unthoughtful, or dilatory treatment. In addition to an efficient and clear process,
Rynes offers four suggestions for employers who want people to have a good impression
of the agency:

1. Time recruitment steps to minimize anxiety. Good candidates expect recruitment
   processes to result in timely notification of being in contention, prompt follow-ups,
   and enough time to make a reasonable choice among offers.

2. Provide feedback to optimize scarce job search resources. “Withholding of
   negative feedback is often interpreted as ‘stringing applicants along’ to preserve
   complete freedom of organizational decision making” (Rynes, 1993, p. 31). In
   other words, as soon as agencies have eliminated applicants by narrowing the field
   to a short list, they should consider notifying candidates rather than wait until the
   final person has been selected.

3. Offer information that makes distinctions. People prefer to have information that
   is detailed enough to allow realistic assumptions about the specific job content
   rather than the single sentence descriptions common in many announcements. In
   the interview process, candidates appreciate a realistic job preview because they
   understand Malcolm Forbes’s view, “If you have a job without aggravation, you
   don’t have a job.”

4. Use enthusiastic, informative, and credible representatives. In the initial
   recruitment process, applicants respond much better to warm and enthusiastic
   recruiters. In the interview process, candidates not only notice whether they meet
   top organizational leaders and coworkers, but also are sensitive to how their time
   is used. Dead time in the schedule or a casual interview schedule is seen as a
   negative factor from the candidate’s perspective.

Overall, treat applicants as customers, and manage the recruitment process in a
professional manner. With the backdrop of these recruitment factors and applicant
preferences, attention now turns to the technical processes.
RECRUITMENT STEPS

Recruitment provides information about available positions and encourages qualified candidates to apply. It has three stages: (1) planning and approval of the position, (2) preparation of the position announcement, and (3) selection and use of specific strategies. The recruitment process should be seamlessly connected with the selection process (Chapter 4). Together these processes are known as staffing (the receipt of applications and the closing date of the position signal the end of recruitment and the beginning of the selection process). The procedure is highlighted in Exhibit 3.1.

Generalizations are necessary but difficult, because substantial variations in the recruitment process exist. Thus, the process for an entry-level position may be quite different from that used for a midlevel manager, which in turn may be unlike that for an

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Exhibit 3.1 The Civil Service Staffing Process

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Recruitment (Chapter 3)

PLANNING AND APPROVAL FOR STAFFING

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

SELECTION OF RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Selection (Chapter 4)

SELECTION OF “TESTS”

SCREEN, INTERVIEW, AND CHECKS (REFERENCE AND OTHER)

NEGOTIATE AND HIRE

POSTSELECTION CONSIDERATIONS
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administrative head. Furthermore, recruitment in small and large organizations will vary considerably. Even large agencies will range between centralized and decentralized practices. Finally, departments often rotate between individual recruitment for a particular position and institutional or pool recruitment to procure many people for a job classification such as entry-level secretaries, accountants, laborers, forest rangers, or caseworkers.

An important long-term trend in the last century was proceduralism (or red tape). It connotes processes that have become excessively detailed, complicated, protracted, or impersonal (e.g., filling out different forms requesting the same information, having to go to multiple locations, or lengthy procedures that could be accomplished in a short time). Ever since the widespread use of civil service systems, the ideal has been to be as neutral as possible to make the process fair and unbiased. To accommodate numerous applicant requests for a large range of positions, centralized systems emerged in the federal government in the 1920s and elsewhere thereafter (Hamman & Desai, 1995, p. 90). Certainly, this was sensible, helping to combat excessive political cronyism and managerial personalism and to overcome a lack of hiring expertise dispersed among various units. It led, however, to rigidity and formalism as well. Adding to proceduralism in the mid-1960s was the interest in providing greater employment accessibility for minorities, women, and other protected classes.

The trend today seeks to ease the effects of proceduralism by decentralizing to allow hiring managers more control and the opportunity to try innovative methods to compete in the new employment environment. Recent government reform initiatives have affected staffing in three ways:

1. There has been a strong drive to decentralize staffing activities in the largest organizations where extreme centralization historically has been the norm. To the extent feasible, line managers are being provided with greater influence in recruitment and selection efforts. This trend has been particularly evident at the federal and state levels because of their size, but much less so with local governments and the not-for-profit sector in which extreme centralization has not been so widespread.

2. Government appears to be making a sincere effort to simplify and invigorate intake functions. Better agencies are spending more time on selling themselves to prospective workers, and they are spending more attention at easing new employees’ passage into the workforce. However, there is clear evidence that agencies’ practices are diverging widely based on both the much more constrained resources of some agencies as well as an organizational interest, or lack thereof, in this critical function (Davidson et al., 2007).

3. Many human resource offices (with legislative approval) are demonstrating a willingness to use increased flexibility and technological innovations such as on-the-spot hiring, fully online applications, and electronic scaling of applications.
PLANNING AND APPROVAL

At least two different types of planning occur in well-managed organizations (Jacobson, 2010; Mintzberg, 1994). First, they engage in strategic thinking about the future needs, challenges, and opportunities of their incoming workforce. True strategic planning requires research, original thinking, and a willingness to change. Second, agencies operationalize strategic plans as concrete positions become available. In other words, preliminary, vital questions should be rigorously asked about available positions before the actual recruitment process takes place (Lavelle, 2007).

Strategic Planning and Management of Vacancies

A plan for staffing begins with a labor market survey or specific position parity studies that compare agency job clusters. What are trends in terms of availability, salaries, and education levels? Statistics and information regarding the national labor force can be obtained at the Bureau of Labor Statistics home page (www.bls.gov); a useful occupational outlook handbook can be found online (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Local and regional data can be gathered from each state’s bureau of labor as well as from some of the larger jurisdictions. Local job parity studies are often performed by local agencies engaging in job evaluation (see Chapter 5) or groups of organizations that jointly commission regular studies to benchmark pay trends. Many agencies do not want to be uncompetitive, while others want to be highly competitive. Public organizations often suffer most in tight labor markets because of the difficulty of implementing flexible pay policies to compete for workers.

In addition to a market analysis, a needs assessment should be done. What does the organization anticipate its requirements will be for new positions, restructured positions, and eliminated positions? These issues may crosscut the entire organization while others primarily affect a series of jobs. Examples include,

- An issue facing organizations today is the retirement of the large Baby Boomer generation (and the last of the traditionalists), as well as the integration of the Generation Xers and New Millennials. Mass retirements always provide challenges, but can offer opportunities for renewal if well planned. One important issue frequently raised relates to succession planning, which refers to an organization’s ability to replace its executive and senior management ranks with high-quality talent (U.S. GAO, 2008a). Other related issues are the differences among the generations and their varying needs and the preferences of newer generations (Bright, 2010), as well as the need to retain or rehire some mature workers past retirement, and hire new older workers who may want a reduced schedule through job sharing or part-time work (Armstrong-Stassen & Templer, 2006; Dychtwald & Baxter, 2007; U.S. GAO, 2008b).
- If an agency is required to strengthen its educative or facilitative role and decrease its regulative role (such as occurred at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development in the 1990s, for instance), then it will need new skills and even different types of staff.

- The rapid shift in the responsibilities—from a traditional war-fighting operation in Desert Storm and the initial invasion in Iraq in 2003, to counterinsurgency and nation building after the fall of Baghdad—caused an enormous strain on the military service that was initially unprepared for the evolution of responsibilities.

- An example at the local level is the housing boom after 2000, and the housing bust beginning in 2007, which has led to dramatic shifts in staffing in code enforcement, building services, and the types of economic development initiatives undertaken. Additionally, dropping home prices have led to automatic tax reductions, and thus lowered public sector revenues (hence widespread hiring freezes and even reductions-in-force in some cases), even as the demand for public services is increasing (especially unemployment benefits, job counseling and training, and welfare benefits).

- Given the rapid growth of law enforcement concerns after 9/11 and increasing demand for heightened border security, an enormous wave of federal hiring has made retaining and hiring public safety personnel dramatically more difficult at the state and local levels. It is nevertheless customary to find workforces lacking the requisite technical, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills. Such mission transitions are common today. Although the decentralization of human resource functions overall has made planning at the systems level more difficult for states and cities, it has made such planning more flexible at the department and unit levels. (See U.S. Office of Personnel Management [U.S. OPM], 2006; and Chapter 2, for a guide to strategic workforce planning and an analytic tool to manage this process.)

Planning can take a number of different forms. Organizations can make sure that the staff intake function is properly funded. They can work on institutional image to positively affect recruitment. Agencies can enhance job quality by offering flexible schedules, family support policies like child care, comparable pay, and technology upgrades. Such planning and action take place long before any particular position is advertised. A final aspect of planning is to make sure that the process is timely and user friendly.

Ultimately, each position that opens may have special problems and opportunities. Administrators need to be able to assess whether a routine protocol is best or whether closer examination is necessary. If any of the following red flags are present, the hiring manager should probably give special attention to a new or customized process:

- Applicants for recent positions have been poorly qualified.
- Supervisors complain that new workers do not fit well into the department.
- The best candidates do not apply.
- Better applicants have already found jobs by the time the position is offered.

When strategic issues are involved, it is time to consult with the human resource department and colleagues in the agency and other organizations, as well as to consult professional trade journals. Systemic concerns should trigger the use of decision-making tools.
such as cause-and-effect charts, statistical analysis, and Delphi techniques (i.e., the pooling of expert opinions on a problem or issue) so that solutions can be found.

An example of a strategic problem comes from a midlevel information technology manager arguing with his supervisor about whether to hire an underqualified but high-potential candidate. The supervisor’s view was that such employees take at least 3 months to have marginal utility and 6 months to perform at standard. Furthermore, some never come up to speed but rather plateau at a low performance level. The midlevel manager’s position was that the unit had five open positions, was struggling to keep up with a rapidly expanding workload, and found that fully qualified personnel were simply not applying, despite a new, higher pay level.

By discussing the systemic problem with human resource experts, however, the manager and supervisor uncovered a strategic opportunity. Why not hire five technically underqualified but high-potential candidates (who were relatively plentiful) and offer a special training class? This would be worth the effort because its size would justify a full-time trainer, which, in turn, would ensure higher-quality training than the ad hoc on-the-job training provided to single hires. Furthermore, furnishing a trainer would reduce the demands on the already overworked personnel in the unit for whom training new employees was generally a distraction.

Only with a clear sense of the demographics and competition of the job market, as well as the general direction of the organization, can one focus with confidence on a specific position.

**Preliminary Decisions About a Specific Position**

Before the recruitment for a position begins, some thought must be given to staffing fundamentals. Is it advisable to fill the position at all? Sometimes it is better to leave one position unfilled so that the spare capacity can be used elsewhere in the unit or organization. Another question is whether the position needs to be restructured or if expectations need to be adjusted (see also Chapter 5 on classification). Has the position become over- or underclassified? Is it too narrowly or too broadly defined? Have fundamental job skills shifted because of technology or program maturation? Sometimes one or two vacancies provide a good opportunity to raise such questions.

If the position is not entry level, should it be filled from candidates internal to the organization only or should it be filled from outside applicants? In very large systems, a third option is outside the agency but within the same governmental system (e.g., federal, state, county, or city). Morale, it is generally argued, is improved by inside (internal) recruitment, whereas depth and diversity are improved by outside (external) recruitment. Generally, “inside only” decisions are used by departments that rely on rank classification (such as the military and public safety organizations) and by strong union agencies in which priority application provisions for existing employees are tantamount to property rights. At the beginning of the recession of 2008, internal recruiting spiked in both the private and public sectors (Crispin & Mehler, 2011), as jobs became scarce and internal candidates got an edge. This trend was soon followed in the public sector by mass government layoffs in which the small number of new recruitments were increasingly open searches (external recruitment) for targeted needs (Davidson, 2010).
The type of recruitment process is another issue: individual versus pool or institutional recruitment. At the federal level, these categories are “case examining” versus “standing inventories.” Broad, entry-level classifications in moderately large organizations generally use pool hiring. For example, a personnel department may generically advertise for numerous entry-level secretaries, computer programmers, and accountants to be placed on a standing certified list to be used by numerous state agencies in the selection process. The advantages are increased efficiency, low cost, and multiple considerations of qualified applications; disadvantages are primarily the difficulties of keeping the list up-to-date. Common or hard-to-fill positions may be on a continuous list in order to constantly replenish candidates. Individual recruitment is used for most positions above the entry level, jobs in smaller organizations, and less common classifications.

A critical decision is the breadth of involvement of those in hiring and related units. Sometimes, typically for entry-level slots, the supervisor is the sole decision maker and works exclusively with the personnel authority. At the other extreme—commonly in senior-level and professional positions—is a search committee that selects the finalists for an interview and recommends a best candidate to the hiring supervisor. A midpoint is often struck for middle management jobs in which input is solicited from the affected subordinates and colleagues, but the final decision is still primarily the domain of the supervisor.

For many positions, especially those involved in first-line management, the question of the generalist versus the specialist arises. Of course, there is no definitive answer; it depends on the needs of the position. Specialists may relate to line workers well and understand technical issues; however, as the philosopher Shunryu Suzuki noted, “In the generalist’s mind there are many opportunities; in an expert’s mind there are few.” Generalists tend to have a broader perspective that is valuable in management positions. On the whole, they can see both the forest and the trees, have superior people skills, and are easier to cross-train. Specialists, on the other hand, can be more efficient because of their technical background, are easier to justify in the budget in frontline supervisory positions, and require relatively little training for the production work that many supervisors today continue to do. The challenge is that frontline positions need specialist abilities, but when those same people are promoted, their new management responsibilities tend to focus on generalist competencies. In the 21st century, it may be less important what one knows and more important what one has in the way of potential to respond to unknown challenges.

The final preliminary issue is getting authority for hiring and approval for any job adjustments that may be needed. Positions are a carefully guarded resource, with hiring freezes instituted directly by presidents, governors, county commissioners, and mayors. Paperwork must be carefully completed, adjustments must be documented, and acquiring formal union approval or informal approval by colleagues is prudent. Hiring supervisors who are sloppy or impatient with the process or inarticulate with their rationale may find their hiring opportunities hamstrung by human resource specialists or stymied by superiors. As often as not, managers who demand expedited processes have simply neglected to plan properly or learn long-established procedures.

In summary, recruitment begins before a position becomes available. An agency that wants to appeal to the best candidates will make sure that it is competitive in terms of pay, reputation, working conditions, and collegiality and that its personnel procurement process has resources to identify and attract the finest people available. As positions become
available, proper planning requires a series of preliminary questions related to job currency and restructuring, inside versus outside recruitment, pool versus individual hiring, scope of involvement, specialist versus generalist characteristics, and timeliness. This planning occurs prior to designing the job announcement, discussed next.

**POSITION ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Because there are no standard legal requirements about minimum information in job (position) announcements, they vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, from entry level to professional recruitment, and from source to source. For example, one jurisdiction may routinely include information about its benefits package, whereas another may not. Or a professional-level announcement in a national trade journal may contain a promotional paragraph about the agency or its jurisdiction that would rarely appear in an entry-level announcement in a local newspaper. Many agencies use advertisements that have relatively little detail, that are aimed at notifying applicants of opportunities that can be more fully explored by requesting more information. A cost-effective compromise may be to post an ad in a national job search website (job board) like Monster.com or Careerpaths.com; such ads include a series of questions that screen qualified prospective applicants as they read them. In any event, the announcement should be designed initially using a full format, which subsequently can be modified (see Exhibit 3.2).

Style and tone matter more in announcements today than in the past because even in an employers’ market, the best applicants are picky about whom they will interview with. Although announcements were once expected to be solemn, standardized, and neutral, now they must, at least to some degree, be inviting and interesting (Zeidner, 2001). In an in-depth analysis of vacancy announcements, the U.S. MSPB criticized federal recruitment in this area:

> Our systematic review of a random sample of vacancy announcements found that at least half of them are poorly written and that they make little or no attempt to sell the government, the agency, or the positions to be filled. Far too often vacancy announcements are difficult to understand and use threatening and insulting language, characteristics that are more likely to drive applicants away than attract them. (U.S. MSPB, 2003, p. 7)

Some of the recommendations from the U.S. MSPB (2003) study that apply to all public sector organizations include the following:

- Greatly reduce the length of vacancy announcements
- Reduce the use of negative, threatening, and legalistic language
- Design a message to sell the job and the agency and, to the extent possible, to present the agency as the employer of choice
- Clearly and realistically describe the job and its requirements
- Require the least amount of information needed to make basic qualification determinations and then request more information as needed later in the process
- Give straightforward instructions on how to apply
Finally, announcements should always be reviewed carefully for both accuracy and currency because misstatements become legally binding and errors make the organization look unprofessional. Of course, announcements should tie directly to the official job description, which in turn often is based on a formal job analysis (see Chapter 5). Although conceptually job analyses and descriptions precede announcements, it is not unheard of that preparation of an announcement sparks changes in a description or causes a new job analysis. Once an announcement is completed and authorized, the department can focus on an appropriate set of recruitment strategies.

Exhibit 3.2 The Elements of a Job Announcement

The following types of information are relatively standard in a full announcement:

1. **Title and agency/organization affiliation.** This can include the official title and/or the working title. The agency/division affiliation is mentioned except when recruitment is being conducted on a centralized basis (e.g., statewide or citywide).

2. **Salary range.** The range generally indicates the starting salary as well as its ceiling. Professional and executive positions may simply state that a “competitive salary” is offered depending on experience and credentials.

3. **Description of job duties and responsibilities.** This is essentially a short job description. What will the incumbent actually do and be responsible for? Supervisory responsibilities, financial duties, and program responsibilities are especially useful in nonentry positions. Work hours are also standard information, although sometimes omitted when conventional.

4. **Minimum qualifications.** What education, skills, and experience are required, as a minimum, to qualify for the job? Education requirements could be a degree in select fields or a specialized certification. Skills could be as specific as typing speed or as general as communication facility. Many positions require specific experience, such as at least 3 years as a planner or 7 years in positions with progressively more responsibility (e.g., managerial). Minimum qualifications must be job related; employers should not arbitrarily raise such qualifications just to reduce the number of job applicants.

5. **Special conditions.** These often signal applicants to aspects of the job that some people (but not necessarily all) may find unappealing. Common special conditions include travel requirements, being stationed at outlying locations, a harsh or dangerous work environment, requirements for background checks, unusual hours, and residency requirements.

6. **Application procedures.** What exam methods will be used? If there is a specific test, when is it administered? Is the examination done by rating the education and experience of candidates? To whom and where does one apply, and with what exact materials? A closing date for the recruitment period is necessary, although sometimes positions “remain open until filled” after the closing date. Re-advertised positions may “begin interviewing immediately.” Otherwise, most jurisdictions require 3 weeks or more to close the recruitment period. Minimum periods for advertising are often in the legal code or statute and should be scrupulously followed. Emergency and temporary hiring practices are always possible but generally require exceptional justification and authorization.
7. *Equal Opportunity Employment.* Standard phrases are used to indicate the organization’s commitment to equal opportunity employment and affirmative action.

Beyond these standard types of information, some other kinds are not routine but are nevertheless common.

1. *Classification.* The specific ranking of the position in the organizational system (grade level) is often not included in external postings because it may confuse outsiders. When it is relatively easy to understand, such as the federal General Schedule, it should be listed. Grade level is invariably of interest to organization members, so internal postings should always include this more technical data.

2. *Career potential.* A good job posting should discourage poorly qualified applicants, but it should also encourage those who are well qualified. Candidates often are looking at not only the position but also its career potential. Mentioning career potential generally helps recruit better and more ambitious applicants. Examples include opportunities for promotion, training and education, and special experience.

3. *Special benefits.* Some positions have special benefits. Examples might be seasonal vacations (such as summers for teachers and faculty), opportunities for extra pay, availability to work with distinguished people, or exceptional retirement programs (such as the military and paramilitary organizations).

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**RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

There are numerous recruitment strategies—methods of contacting and informing potential applicants—but seldom are they all used. Of course, it is not the sheer number that determines a quality intake process but the choice of an appropriate combination. Unfortunately, governments historically have eschewed aggressive recruitment practices. There is a new activism today (U.S. MSPB, 2006), which means that agencies are using more approaches and trying to do so with more effect. Ten strategies are discussed here, each of which has strengths and weaknesses and, therefore, various utilization patterns. Four major factors (relative ease of use, effectiveness, cost, and common usage) will be identified for each strategy.

1. **Job posting** was originally the placing of the announcement on walls in prominent places such as post offices or city halls. Many civil service systems still require physical posting in a minimum number of public places. Today it also refers to listing jobs with in-house job bulletins, newspapers, or standard communications. Posting is considered the most basic of all recruitment strategies; it is easy to do because the entire announcement can be used without modification.

   Its effectiveness is largely limited to organization members and aggressive job seekers who come to the agency’s employment office. For a job that must be filled internally, say a fire lieutenant’s position, posting alone can be sufficient. Many positions, however, are recruited outside the organization and traditional posting
is unlikely to be effective. As Eleanor Trice (1999) of the International Personnel Management Association said, “The days when government organizations could recruit by simply posting a vacancy announcement, then sitting back and assuming that enough qualified applicants would apply, are gone” (p. 10).

2. Today, posting also refers to \textit{electronic posting}—listing jobs on (a) agency websites or (b) websites exclusively dedicated to job seekers (also known as job boards). The Internet is an enormously important recruitment tool whose cost is minimal, so agency website posting has become the “passive” recruitment base and specialized government job boards have become a very important active strategy.

Electronic posting in agencies is now required by law for federal positions that are competitively recruited; the same is true for all but the most specialized jobs or the smallest agencies in state and local government. Such posting may be located on the website for human resource or personnel department, state personnel board, or civil service commission. The federal government decentralizes the responsibility to individual agencies. With a single exception currently, all states allow online applications and many now require online applications rather than physical applications. Applicants normally are required to register and “build a résumé” in the agency site, and then to either identify specific jobs or to request that one’s competencies be matched with all appropriate jobs. If applicants are interested in specific jobs, it is recommended that they be sure to include key competency phrases that are used in electronic review of resumes. Although not as common as in private organizations (Mareschal & Rudin, 2010), many agencies also allow uploading of resumes, but applicants are warned that initial screening is invariably from the application resume, not the uploaded resume. Uploaded resumes are more useful later in the search process, for example, the interview phase.

Because ultimately all but a very small number of noncompetitive applicants must go through the agency website, even when other means may be the initial point of reference, the quality of the website is of vital significance (Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004; Kim & O’Connor, 2009; Selden & Orenstein, 2011). The quality of the recruiting area of agency websites includes the quality of images, videos, and testimonials about the organization as a place to work, usability, links, feedback capacity, personalization, application tracking, online testing, job matching, and related elements (Williamson, King, Lepak, & Sarma, 2010). Detailed information about positions and how to apply is very important for the motivation of high-quality candidates (Breaugh, 2008). Identifying agency websites is easy by searching the Internet for “agency-name government jobs,” which puts the relevant agency at or near the top of the search. For example, searching for “California State Government Jobs” will generally put http://www.spb.ca.gov, the California State Personnel Board, at the top of the list.

A job board is an employment website that focuses on employment opportunities available in general, in a region, or in an industry. Examples of general job boards are CareerBuilder, Yahoo! HotJobs, Monster.com, and Craigslist. Generally the sites that require active employer input are considered more reliable, rather than sites that relay secondary information from other sites (an activity called scraping). However, sometimes sites that provide links to
local government employment opportunities can be useful (e.g., www.ejobs.com, which provides state-by-state listings) and can provide up-to-date information. The general move for all but the most basic jobs has been to niche sites, those that target regions, industries, and/or professional levels more narrowly (Breaugh, 2008) because of the large number of unqualified applicants generic job boards tend to generate. The public sector has avoided using generic, private-sector websites that are not themselves sponsored by government organizations. An excellent example of a public sector job board is usajobs.gov, which is an OPM-maintained clearinghouse for all federal jobs. Most state governments are essentially job boards for all of their agencies because hiring goes through a centralized personnel agency. Of course state and local government employment offices help facilitate employment primarily targeted at the private sector, but this is through a specialized unemployment division and has a different focus and mission, often including unemployment benefits, retraining programs, and career skills support for the general public. Federal data show that electronic posting is the second most important method after friends or relatives (U.S. MSPB, 2008a, 2008b).

3. **Personal contact recruitment** occurs when potential applicants are personally encouraged to apply for positions. The single most important recruitment source according to many experts is employee referrals (Crispin & Mehler, 2011; U.S. MSPB, 2008a, 2008b). Employees often know others who are in the same field, are enthusiastic in their recommendations, but generally provide useful realistic job previews as well. While there are obvious issues with excessive reliance on employee referrals, such as potentially fostering cronyism, well-managed selection systems with a rigorous sense of merit mitigate these weaknesses.

Another source of personal contact is when recruiters, managers, or search panel members attend job fairs, conduct on-campus recruiting, or individually contact top candidates for positions. Recruiters generally travel to such events, perhaps across town but sometimes to other states, or make targeted calls to potential candidates who have not applied. Such tactics are routine for some corporations, professional sports teams, and elite law firms, but are less common for all but the largest government agencies. Job fairs provide candidates a chance to talk to prospective employers and provide the organization an opportunity to increase its visibility and scout for suitable talent. The practice of managers personally contacting executive candidates is typical in business; it is less typical in the public sector, which is considered vulnerable to accusations of cronyism and bias. Nonetheless, job fairs are reported as being more important than www.usajobs.gov to those under 30, while older job seekers relied far more heavily on both www.usajobs.gov and the agency’s website (U.S. MSPB, 2008a). Some federal and large state/local agencies make it a point to participate in job fairs and even campus events (e.g., U.S. GAO, 2011).

Social media are emerging as major factors in private sector recruiting (Black, 2010; Crispin & Mehler, 2011), but have yet to have a major impact on most public sector employment. Some major agencies are beginning to use Facebook (the more generic social media platform), LinkedIn (the more professionally targeted platform),
You Tube, Flickr, and Twitter as information tools and as occasional blogging devices. Social media are rarely the initial or final contact; however, they have enormous potential to be a powerful cultivation technique as they provide quick and interesting bursts of information (Flickr and Twitter), video- and context-rich cases and briefings (YouTube), and blog discussions about issues and trends (Facebook and LinkedIn). Unlike other domains such as advertising and political outreach, these social media are unlikely to be a major interest for public sector agencies in recruiting until the job market tightens up, even though such methods clearly provide value and depth in terms of the recruitment tool kit of strategies.

4. **Newspaper recruitment** focuses on local or regional openings. The employment section of the largest local Sunday paper is the most common vehicle for job announcements, but some jurisdictions use daily employment sections as well. Smaller papers may be ideal for a local job, especially those that are entry level, low paying, or part time. Despite cost, newspapers can be relatively effective in external recruitment, especially when advertisements have multiple job listings.

5. **Trade journals** are the newsletters and magazines that inform members of professions about activities on a regular basis (e.g., PA Times, ICMA Newsletter, and IPMA Newsletter). The audience is narrower than that of a newspaper in terms of professional range but broader in terms of national scope. Trade journals are used extensively for professional and senior management positions in which high levels of specialized expertise are desired and generally available only on the national market. If a federal agency is looking for a senior math statistician, a state agency is seeking a director for its lottery department, or a municipality is searching for a city manager, they are all likely to list these positions in relevant journals where candidates can easily scan the entire job market. To the degree that appointive positions use open procedures, trade journals are also a strategy of choice, despite the associated cost.

6. **Mail (and e-mail) recruitment** (custom mailing) is a highly personalized approach in which individuals are encouraged by letter to apply. Aggressive private sector corporations use this strategy to contact students who are in the top few deciles of a handful of institutions identified as sources of exceptional candidates. Even more targeted recruitment occurs when a search committee identifies a select number of individuals who are exceedingly qualified and then personally encourages them. Such an approach “seeds” the recruitment pool with candidates who may not otherwise apply. It is rarely used in the public sector but is a mainstay strategy for Fortune 500 companies. Both sectors use search firms that rely on such personalized approaches. In addition, e-mail provides an inexpensive, informal, and rapid outreach technique.

7. **Institutional capacity recruiting** focuses more on ensuring that job seekers consider an agency in general and visit its job application website, than really focusing on specific jobs. Some organizations (e.g., state universities) use institutional advertising, especially when they have a service to sell. This advertising increases awareness and prestige, even though it does not target select positions. Examples are government access TV, radio advertisements, billboards,
and positive public relations stories, especially “best-places-to-work” media coverage. Government-access TV is frequently used by cities and counties that have a controlled-access government station provided by the authorized cable company. It is common for these stations to list available jobs at various times throughout the day. Governments will sometimes buy advertising space on the radio and other media when the job market is very tight. Positive media coverage can have a similar effect on recruitment efforts because of the increased prestige of the agency or department.

8. **Internship recruitment** programs are a usual practice in many midsized and large jurisdictions (see Exhibit 3.3 for two examples). Elite organizations screen interns nearly as closely as job applicants because of program cost and subsequent high hiring rates. Consequently, such opportunities are a standard element of almost all master’s of public administration (MPA) curricula. Program quality in these internships can be quite high. Organizations that make large-scale and effective use of this strategy report that the benefits in terms of training, acculturation, job preview, and job longevity are unequaled by other methods.

Exhibit 3.3 Examples of Internship Recruiting

**Management Internship**

*City of Phoenix, Arizona*

**About the Program**

The City of Phoenix Management Intern Program has been attracting outstanding individuals to government service since 1950. If you are interested in a career in public administration, this one-year, full-time program is an excellent opportunity to experience a variety of innovative management systems; gain exposure to many of the issues facing a large, well-run city government; and develop important professional skills. Our program is one of the most respected local government training programs in the United States. It is designed to attract, develop, and retain innovative people in local government.

**A Wide Range of Experiences**

- If selected, you will work in the City Manager’s Office, the Budget and Research Department, and a department that provides direct service to the community. You will also work on a wide array of projects and assignments that will develop and refine your professional skills. Past completed projects include
  - researching and coordinating outreach activities to increase the diversity of community leaders on public arts boards,
  - analyzing best practices to implement a pilot program to apprehend graffiti vandals, and
  - developing a department budget.

*(Continued)*
Professional Development

This program gives you the opportunity to observe firsthand the efforts of a large city government to resolve some of its most pressing issues. You will staff administrative and community committees and attend city council and management policy meetings. You will be able to network with the city’s top officials and managers through one-on-one meetings. You also will have the opportunity to attend local and regional professional conferences during the year where you can meet and network with government professionals from throughout the Southwest.

Salary and Benefits

The present salary for 2012 is $36,150 annually. City employees who are in a higher salary range would remain at their current rate of pay throughout the program.

- The city’s comprehensive benefits package includes medical and dental insurance, city-sponsored training, and seminar/tuition reimbursement. For more information, please visit phoenix.gov/JOBspecs/bene007.html.

Presidential Management Fellowship

About the Program

Since 1977, the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program and its predecessor, the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program, have been attracting outstanding graduate, law, and doctoral students to the federal service. The PMF Program is your passport to a unique and rewarding career experience with the federal government. It provides you with an opportunity to apply the knowledge you acquired from graduate study. As a PMF, your assignments may involve public policy and administration; domestic or international issues; information technology; human resources; engineering, health, and medical sciences; law; financial management; and many other fields in support of public service programs.

Eligibility

Graduate students from all academic disciplines who expect to complete an advanced degree (master’s, law, or doctoral-level degree) from a qualifying college or university during the current academic year are eligible to be nominated by their schools if they demonstrate the following: breadth and quality of accomplishments, capacity for leadership, and a commitment to excellence in the leadership and management of public policies and programs.

Application Period

The PMF application will be available via a vacancy announcement on USAJOBS (www.usajobs.gov) and via a link on the “PMF Application” Web page. Specific dates for the application period will be announced in the vacancy announcement. (Applications are always accepted in the fall.) Eligible applicants are those students who will meet graduate degree requirements before the end of the academic year corresponding to that year’s application period. For example, students meeting graduate degree requirements between September 1, 2011, and August 31, 2012, would apply between October 1–15, 2011, for acceptance to the PMF class of 2012.

SOURCES: City of Phoenix website; U.S. OPM website.
9. **Headhunting**, or external recruitment, occurs when the staffing function is farmed out to a third party that makes the initial contact or even provides the hiring contract. Ironically, it is used most for both the lowest and highest, but not the middle positions in government. Public agencies contract employment firms, especially in a tight labor market, for basic labor, clerical, and temporary positions (generally en masse). At the top end of the spectrum, private sector organizations have long relied on headhunting strategies to fill executive and senior management positions. This strategy is less prevalent in government, which places a premium on open processes from beginning to end. Executive headhunting is on the upswing as an expanded practice in state governments; it has always been common for city and county management positions. Large public agencies may also have a specialized internal executive recruiter who will actively seek out high-quality candidates. The executive recruiter for the County of Riverside handles only searches for deputy director level and up. Departments are required to do job analyses that are more thorough, candidates get more “red carpet” treatment, and the pool normally is seeded with some applicants who have been personally recruited to apply by phone or e-mail.

10. **Noncompetitive recruitment** means that a single official completes the process without a formal comparison of candidates (also called direct or one-day hiring). Therefore, recruitment may be “open” for certain jobs or types of applicants. Sometimes it means that immediate hiring is allowed if candidates meet certain standards; at other times the decision maker simply has the authority to select those people deemed appropriate. An illustration of the first instance is when local government recruiters are authorized to hire hard-to-fill categories on the spot, or when the federal government allows its campus recruiters to hire students immediately if they meet certain grade point standards (e.g., the Outstanding Scholar Program). Even under periods when the employee pool surges, there are still hard-to-fill categories necessitating standards-based, noncompetitive hiring. An example of the second instance is the process of appointing confidential staff: elected and senior appointed officials can hire advisers, deputies, and personal assistants without either a formal merit or legislative consent process (known as Schedule B appointments at the federal level, which do not require a competitive examination). There are a small number of exceptional cases that governments may routinely exempt from competition, such as military spouses at the federal level (Long, 2011). Of course, a noncompetitive process is easier and less costly than other methods. The practice is effective in a limited number of cases such as hard-to-fill positions where meeting a given standard is sufficient for hiring, or where political and personal loyalty is an appropriate factor. However, since it is open to abuse and violates merit principles, noncompetitive recruitment is generally highly restricted and monitored.

Which strategies are best for which jobs? For management positions in police, fire, and paramilitary organizations with strong seniority policies, there is little reason to go much
beyond physical and virtual posting. Organizational members wait for these opportunities, and internal recruitment is usually sufficient. The situation is quite different elsewhere, when competition for high-quality candidates can often be fierce. The question is not which but how many strategies to use, given financial and personnel resources. Following its strategic plan, the U.S. State Department uses both cutting-edge technology and interpersonal relations. By integrating traditional marketing, outreach techniques, and public relations with Web-based technology, its Diplomatic Readiness Initiative made the department’s recruitment program a model (Pearson, 2004).

The strengths of public sector recruitment have been in notification strategies—job posting, electronic posting, newspapers, trade journals, and institutional capacity methods. Traditional weaknesses have been the lack of expensive, proactive strategies—well-paid internship programs (with the notable exception of internships with the federal government), systematic personal contacts outside employee referrals, mail recruitment, head-hunting, and noncompetitive hiring. Future innovations are more likely to be in these latter strategies (see Exhibit 3.4). Current innovations cluster around increasing timeliness, in general, and flexibility where positions are hard to fill (see Exhibit 3.5). In 2004, for instance, U.S. OPM developed Recruitment One-Stop, an integrated, governmentwide online recruitment system. A critical aspect in selecting recruitment strategies is determining whom they target and whether they encourage diversity in the organization; promoting diversity in recruitment is examined below.

Exhibit 3.4  Just How Aggressive Should Public Sector Organizations Become?

Government is often urged to act more like business. Should it adopt private sector strategies about recruitment? For example, should it abandon competitive hiring (comparing multiple candidates) for selected “hot” fields and substitute minimum standards coupled with on-the-spot hiring in order to make timely offers? Should it use signing bonuses, common in the private sector for difficult-to-hire positions? Although there was a time when this strategy was unheard of, it is sometimes used by jurisdictions desperate to fill medical, scientific, engineering, and cyber-security positions. Should government follow the example of those corporations that target select institutions where the graduates are known to be superior, often tracking specific students during the latter part of their academic study? Should agencies actively hire specific high-performing employees away from other organizations, even though they have not applied for positions? Corporate raiding of employees is common practice, often with public sector employees being the target. Is it appropriate and ethical for public agencies to use such an approach? Finally, should the inducements for outstanding candidates be enhanced by special contracts promising advantageous opportunities? An example might include rotational fast-track assignments for junior applicants (this has always been done to some degree in the military with academy officers). Instances of these proactive strategies exist in the government, but they are all unusual. How common should they be? Just how aggressive should public sector organizations become?
A major strength of recruiting for many not-for-profit organizations has been the passion that many people have for the “doing good” aspect that is intrinsic to much of the sector. These agencies often have a humanitarian basis over areas such as arts and culture, education, the environment, animals, health, human services, international affairs, public affairs, social benefits, spiritual and psychic health, science and technology, and social sciences. Not-for-profits also cover advocacy groups such as professional associations and political interest groups. While the larger and better-funded nonprofits mirror the practices of most public sector organizations very closely, many of the tens of thousands of smaller ones find it difficult to do so because of funding and other resource constraints. Nonetheless, they often find that they are competing in the same pool for staff and must follow public sector rules because of the obligations required by their government contracts, or to maintain their tax status. These challenges are illustrated in Exhibit 3.6.
Susan Spice,
M.P.A.

It goes without saying that one of the best ways to prevent high turnover is to hire the right person for the right job at the right time. There are several challenges that managers face in trying to achieve this balance, however. For example, recruitment of the “right” person may not be possible unless the position is available, there is funding for it, and, in some cases, there is legislative authority to hire for it. Large agencies have a greater pool in which to fish, either for employees to promote, employees seeking lateral transfers, or individuals wanting to join the agency. Public sector recruitment is constrained by specific regulations on when jobs can be posted and how long the posting must remain open; nonprofits may have the same constraints if they provide governmental services.

Getting the recruitment process “right” suggests that there is a strategy to be employed. This implies that the agency knows that a vacancy will occur, when it will happen, and that there will be sufficient time and money to recruit the ideal candidate. The reality is that many agencies do not become aware of a pending vacancy until the outgoing employee turns in his or her two-week notice of intent to leave. This leaves the manager scrambling to get the job advertised and interviews completed in a timely manner. It also leaves the position’s supervisor hoping that at least one qualified, desirable potential employee will respond to the posting in time and, if interviewed early in the process, will be willing to wait until the position closes before being offered the job.

This was an issue, especially with the nursing staff, at the not-for-profit organization (NPO) where I worked from 1998 to 2006. The staff consisted of 13 nurses (who provided case management for approximately 8,000 North Florida children receiving public assistance or who had chronic health problems), four secretaries, and five administrative personnel. On rare occasions, a nurse’s departure was expected, usually so she could accompany her husband to his new job in another town. More often than not, the supervisor would learn about an employee’s intent to leave when she handed in her resignation.

The administrative assistant generally posted the job announcement within 24 to 48 hours of being told of the imminent departure. As a state-contracted service provider, the agency followed state human resource policies. Because of this, announcements had to remain open for at least one month from initial posting. Thus, the challenge was to find a replacement interested in working with pediatric case management, who had sufficient qualifications (a BS degree in nursing was required), could receive background and fingerprint clearance, and was interested in working with our client base. Strategic planning and headhunting were not viable options because we rarely knew when positions would become available.

There were similar issues with the secretaries, although it was considerably easier to replace them because of the difference in skill level required. Unfortunately, being an NPO meant salaries were not high. This, and the physical nature of the work (filing hundreds of client charts a day), limited the pool of individuals interested in working with us to young women in their early 20s. However, recent changes in the structure of the “secretarial pool” have radically decreased turnover. Originally four positions, the secretarial pool was cut to three with the fourth salary (and workload) shared between the remaining employees. This raised their salaries to a level where they could support themselves, which reduced turnover. Their increased workload actually raised morale because the remaining secretaries felt more valued and appreciated.
Promoting Diversity in Recruitment

Even though affirmative action has been deemphasized in recent years, a diverse workforce is both ethical and a management necessity (Armstrong et al., 2010). There are three factors to consider. First, does the agency provide an environment compatible for diversity through its promotion processes and organizational culture? A department that insists on standard working hours, does not provide child care assistance, and subtly penalizes leaves of absence for family reasons does not create a suitable atmosphere for employee-parents. Such issues might be subtle but are critical if a diverse environment is to be created and to be optimally productive.

One illustration of providing a hospitable environment is the creation of spousal assistance programs. Spousal assistance may be offered to help reduce the trauma of relocating families. Such plans are more conventional in the private sphere (28%), especially in large corporations (52%), than in the public sector (Mercer, 1996). For dual-career couples, a transfer or relocation of one spouse is highly disruptive to the other’s career plans. This has led to refusals to accept jobs, promotions, or transfers to avoid such disruptions. Organizations that do not provide spousal assistance may find themselves accepting less-than-ideal candidates for positions because their preferred candidate declined to relocate. Another example of providing support for diversity is in increasing the participation rate of individuals with disabilities. Some of the elements that promote diversity in this area are top leadership support, regular screening of the workforce to identify potential barriers to employment and work success, the training of staff who do not have disabilities but affect their employment and success, providing a flexible work environment, and providing centralized reasonable accommodation funding (U.S. GAO, 2011).

Second, is there a conscious attempt to maintain a well-rounded workforce so that no group, including white males, has a legitimate complaint? Are resources made available to minority members in the organization? All things being equal, qualified women and minorities should be given priority if they are clearly underrepresented in proportion to the available, eligible workforce. Research indicates that minorities are highly sensitive to the presence of role models in the recruitment process and to the comparative level of resources available (Gilbert, 2000). Although the public sector has generally done better than business in this regard (e.g., U.S. MSPB, 2009), there are many workplaces that are still negligent or lax in promoting diversity successfully. Examples include not hiring women in paramilitary agencies, traces of a glass ceiling (i.e., cultural barriers impeding groups from executive positions) for women and minorities, lower employment of Hispanics in...
the federal workforce (U.S. GAO, 2006), and a low representation of African Americans in senior management positions across all levels of government (U.S. MSPB, 2008c).

Third, there should be awareness that where and how recruitment takes place will have an effect (Thaler-Carter, 2001). Sometimes procurement practices need to target locations where diverse candidates are more likely to congregate (perhaps particular schools or job fairs) and ethnically diverse universities and sources that such individuals are likely to read (such as ethnically oriented newspapers and newsletters).

Dividing Responsibilities

There is no hard-and-fast rule about who is responsible for what aspects of recruitment. As discussed in the Wye River Conference (see Exhibit 1.6 in Chapter 1), the central agency should enable individual units and managers to better perform the human resource function. In large government agencies, the responsibility has been divided among three entities: (1) the centralized human resource office, (2) full-time human resource experts in agencies and departments, and (3) local managers and supervisors. The centralized human resource office is often responsible for (1) overseeing diversity plans, (2) providing a comprehensive listing of recruitment sources, (3) supplying coordination of institutional recruitment (such as mass entry-level positions) and personal procurement (such as job fairs and college recruitment), and (4) furnishing a centralized recruitment source when departments elect not to handle recruitment on their own. These offices function as expert sources of assistance for departments. A second approach is that agencies have either full-time human resource experts or coordinators with personnel responsibilities. These specialists provide support to operational units and monitor hiring practices. Finally, organizations may conduct much of their recruitment directly, especially for midlevel and senior positions. This has the advantage of increased buy-in and involvement from departments in the entire process; it also may mean that there is an opportunity for inappropriate practices if hiring units do not take the responsibility seriously or plan for it properly. Increasingly, line managers are mandated to attend training before being allowed to participate in the hiring process to ensure that organizational and legal requirements are met.

ENHANCING RECRUITMENT PROSPECTS:
THE SEEKER’S PERSPECTIVE

The basics of job seeking may be widely known but are not necessarily commonly practiced.

- The first suggestion is to know the recruitment process and know what resources are available. Reading this chapter accomplishes the first aspect. Learning where recruitment occurs in a targeted profession includes consulting with practicing professionals who can identify the standard trade journals, knowing the newspapers that carry the appropriate advertisements, and exploring to find additional sources through the Internet and elsewhere. Developing personal contacts—networking—can make an enormous difference in discovering good prospects (see Exhibit 3.7).
The mantra for any job seeker is networking, networking, networking. Professional acquaintances help job seekers by giving them advance notice of upcoming openings and agency needs. They can also act as advocates for those they would like to see fill positions in their agency or department or serve as references who can vouch for the job experience, performance, and personal attributes of job seekers. It is well known that jobs may have been wired for others; these people often had a network of advocates working for them. Most professionals belong to several networks. On the national level, for example, you may belong to a national association in your specific line of work. Other networks are statewide or regional associations for more in-depth or frequent interaction with other professionals in your field. And still others are local groups of all types, formal and informal.

Networks are not built overnight. They are often the result of attending professional conferences for several years and building ties with similar professionals in other agencies. Such ties often are formed among those with similar professional interests, commitments, and values. Indeed, a basic, prerequisite skill for any professional is the ability to articulate these in a relatively concise and coherent fashion: People need to know what others stand for. How else do humans form enduring bonds?

It is unclear how large a professional network needs to be in order to be effective, but most professionals who feel part of a network would know about 30 to 60 people fairly well and probably know a couple hundred by face or name. How do people get to know so many people? First, most individuals know more people than they realize and even more people who could introduce them to others if only they were asked to do so. Second, a large network requires a commitment to go to venues such as conferences where people meet others. Attending a conference once may lead to knowing only a very few others, but attending for 4 years may lead to knowing half the attendees. Maintaining a professional network requires an investment of time to keep others informed of your professional self. Third, another great way to network is to volunteer. Often people at lower levels in the organizations know what they want to do, but their job or boss does not provide for that. Volunteering for a nonprofit is a great way to gain experience and meet people. Doing good, professional work outside the scope of employment might even get back to a current employer who then may consider the volunteer “management material” because of the extra commitment shown.

Having a strong network, and helping others in the network, brings numerous rewards. Networking is also helpful for other purposes, such as to increase professional resources for doing one’s job (getting advice, help with a problem). Through networking, job seekers also learn about employers: Are they really as good as they claim? Are others happy working there? Or is the department a snake pit, best to be avoided? People in a network often have information about these matters. Find out where people who have similar interests go. Join with them. It will be worth the cost.

- Take the time to envision the types of jobs, organizations, and career paths you might be interested in. For those without public sector experience, this may mean a review of lesser-known agencies in order to expand horizons.
- Next, carefully screen jobs before applying. Although it may cost little to send out 100 résumés, it is discouraging to hear nothing from so many, which is likely to happen with a shotgun approach. If one does not already bring some appropriate expertise or some special experience to a job, there is little likelihood of being a finalist. If necessary experience is lacking, there may be a need to either get more experience in an internship or take a lower-level position.
• Make sure that all the information about the job is available. Short newspaper and trade journal advertisements are generally reduced versions of the full announcements. Contact the appropriate source to see if there is additional information available.

• Take the time to write a customized, flawless cover letter. A letter that is simply “good” will not be noticed. A substantive one is highly focused, responding to the exact points covered in the job announcement. Although all the elements indicated in the announcement may be in the résumé, be sure that they are spelled out in the sequence requested in the cover letter. Failure to do so indicates a lack of seriousness.

• Write a carefully crafted résumé. Certainly you must not make things up, but be sure the résumé has all the relevant experience and that the presentation is professional in content. Résumé writing is an art, and those making distinctions at the reviewing end quickly become master critics. Many “how-to” guides are available online and in bookstores. Generally, they discuss variations of two types of résumés (the chronological and the functional), as well as presentation styles. You should always have your résumé reviewed by an expert. Be sure to have an electronic copy that can be altered for specific jobs. Use the term curriculum vitae (Latin for “course of life”) if the job has a research or academic component.

• When selected as a finalist, immediately do research on the organization via the Web and via information provided by the initial point of contact, friends, and any other sources (discussed in Chapter 4). In many cases, failure to have a general knowledge about the organization in the interview is often considered either a lack of interest or a lack of initiative, and constitutes a good reason for a low ranking.

Advancing From Job Seeking to Career Development

Midcareer professionals (including most completing MPA degrees) are beyond such basics. They have had one or more positions and perhaps have been a part of the hiring process themselves. Those retooling their skills and looking at entry-level positions are seeking jobs whose career potential is exceptional. They understand that the competition for good management and technical jobs is generally quite intense. For example, in one study of public sector hiring practices, 85% of the hiring managers reported that they use the quality of the candidate’s application itself to a great or moderate extent in selection (U.S. MSPB, 2003). For the ambitious midcareer professional, by necessity, job seeking needs to evolve into carefully planned career development. Some tips include:

• In addition to passively hunting for positions, the midcareer professional needs to envision the ideal position. Such a process requires the candidate to distinguish critical job characteristics from those that are unimportant. It also helps the career developer to focus on the most appropriate prospects.

• At the same time, individuals need to assess their strengths and weaknesses candidly. Of course, the initial question is rating one’s own technical competence and experience. Technical competence and experience are only part of what employers seek, however (Hicks, 1998). Frequently, the single most desired
characteristic is communication skills (written, oral, listening, persuasiveness). Does the candidate have basic computer literacy skills, such as competence in word processing, spreadsheet programs, Internet usage, and the standard programs utilized in the field? Also high on employers’ lists are team skills, facility with interpersonal relations, and the ability to be creative and innovative. Those seriously developing their career today need to make sure that they have not only developed these skills, but also have examples to demonstrate competency.

- A rigorous self-assessment should lead one to *enhance the ability to demonstrate one’s strengths*. One of the best ways is to develop a portfolio of materials, examples, and references. Copies of successful projects, job evaluations, photographs where visual representations are useful, and letters of reference are examples of the types of materials to be collected and shared as needed.

- The self-assessment should also lead a career developer to *improve weaknesses*. Deficiencies can be improved by self-study and reading, by training inside or outside the organization, and by formal education. Strengthening weaknesses takes considerable self-discipline because it is easier to ignore or hide them; yet not addressing them damages both job prospects and performance. In a competitive market, lack of exceptional or unusual knowledge, skills, and abilities may be a weakness because basic qualifications are assumed. For instance, although police chiefs (and senior police commanders) in large municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies may not technically be required to have master’s degrees, management and executive training at the FBI and national command schools, and areas of extraordinary competence, the reality is that such jobs are inundated with exceptional candidates who do possess all these characteristics.

- Better jobs always include a substantial interview process in which the position is often won or lost. *There is no substitute for practice*. When practiced, difficult questions offer a chance to shine. When unpracticed, these questions are just tough and cause elimination.

- Finally, even before the actual recruitment process begins, those seeking better positions must *be realistic, practical, and disciplined*. Preparation for the position should begin long before the recruitment process. The procedure itself is generally a protracted effort, requiring a long-term devotion of personal resources, numerous attempts, and self-discipline in the face of challenges and disappointments.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Finding talented workers for the public sector organization is a function involving five elements, of which the quality of the recruitment process per se is only one. Pay, labor pool size, organizational image, and job quality are also important. A first-class intake process can optimize or minimize these other factors substantially. Historically, recruitment has not been a strength in many organizations. Of the seven staffing steps, the first three constituting recruitment often have been the more passively administered, whereas those that
constitute selection have been the more rigorously pursued. If competitive candidates are not in the pool, however, then the value of a neutral and precise selection process is limited.

What steps can be taken to ensure that appropriate applicants are attracted? First, quality recruitment is affected by planning. This involves asking and answering key questions, in advance of hiring, so that the recruitment and selection processes do not waste time and resources. Errors include not anticipating vacancies and labor shortages, not providing proper funding for recruitment, not mitigating negative factors, and not effectively identifying agency strengths. Competent planning involves asking pertinent questions about the position, such as whether (1) it is needed at all, (2) it should be hired from within, or (3) it should be restructured, as well as (4) who should be involved in the process and whether necessary forethought has been devoted to the authorization process. The announcement should always be written out fully. It is unwise to rush an advertisement to press before it is carefully crafted and endorsed. The final consideration is which recruitment methods to use in combination, with the goal of producing a customized applicant pool. Strategies include physical posting, electronic posting, personal contact, newspapers, trade journals, custom mailings, institutional capacity recruiting, internship programs, headhunting, and noncompetitive recruiting. The variety of methods and the need for a diverse workforce place a major responsibility on the line manager, who is increasingly responsible for organizing and implementing the recruitment process.

Clearly, the recruitment of high-quality human capital is an area that is particularly susceptible to reform for those agencies serious about being “world-class organizations.” Traditional passivity must give way to more aggressive strategies in which quality candidates are actively sought. There must be an insistence that most recruitment pools include truly exceptional, rather than just acceptable candidates. This implies that organizations must devote more resources and energy to recruitment, just as the armed forces did when converting from a draft to a volunteer system in the 1970s. The business example of senior managers going on annual recruiting trips is unusual in the public sector but should be practiced more frequently. Finally, it is critical that unit supervisors and employees take seriously their increased responsibilities in decentralized recruiting systems, because they directly affect the quality of the future workforce.

**KEY TERMS**

Electronic posting  
Fast-track positions  
Headhunting  
Human capital  
Individual vs. “pool” hiring  
Individual planning  
Inside (internal) vs. outside (external) recruitment  
Institutional recruitment  
Internship recruitment  
Job (position) announcements  
Job posting  
Labor market survey  
Mail (and e-mail) recruitment  
Noncompetitive recruitment  
Personal contact recruitment  
Proceduralism  
Recruitment process  
Recruitment strategies  
Sham recruitment  
Staffing  
Succession planning
CHAPTER 3  Recruitment

EXERCISES

Class Exercises

1. In your area, identify some of the factors affecting recruitment, excluding the recruitment process itself. That is, discuss the labor pool, pay and benefits, images of public sector organizations, and perceptions of jobs in government as they affect local agencies’ recruitment capacity.

2. How broadly should members of the hiring unit participate in the staffing process? Does the nature of the position (e.g., entry vs. midlevel, administrative requiring a master’s degree) make a difference? When should a hiring unit vote on the best candidate (such as is common for state university faculty positions)?

3. What examples have class members witnessed, if any, of shoddy or inappropriate recruitment practices? How should those practices be modified or improved?

4. What internships are available in the state, county, and cities in your area? Which are paid? How does one apply? Are there any fellowship programs?

5. What is the typical size of the applicant pool for jobs in your organization (be it a public agency, university, or nonprofit organization)? Typically, how many applicants are minimally qualified? Well qualified? Are job searches ever canceled for lack of qualified applicants?

6. Review two public sector websites devoted to employment in an agency or department. Compare them. Examples of comparison items might include (a) attractiveness, navigation, organization, currency, social media opportunities, and testimonials; (b) quality of job descriptions, completeness of job descriptions, clarity of application process, clarity of pay and benefits, and ability to ask questions and interact with people about job prospects; and (c) quality of supplemental information, such as organizational reputation and friendliness of the process.

Team Exercises

7. To what extent would you emphasize future potential over current skills in each of the following jobs: office manager, police recruit, division director, and agency director (appointive but nominated by a committee)?

8. Find out from group members what recruitment strategies they have personally experienced, as well as their perceptions of those sources (e.g., postings vs. newspapers vs. the Internet).

9. According to your group members, what would agencies have to do to attract the most outstanding university students?

10. Identify and discuss some paradoxes from your own recruitment experience.
Individual Assignments

11. Rate each of the following factors, by percentage, in terms of importance in recruiting a social service case management supervisor. The unit is predominantly white females, characterized by low pay, low morale, and high turnover.
   
   Knowledge, skills, and abilities ___%  
   Motivation ___%  
   Diversity ___%  
   Loyalty ___%  

12. In the previous example, if you believed that there was only one well-qualified internal candidate who happened to be the only white male in the unit, would you recruit internally or externally? What would your goal be? How would you use recruitment to achieve that goal? How would you publicize that goal to the hiring unit?

13. Clip or print some job advertisements for public sector jobs from several sources, including the local paper. What are the variations in format and style that you notice? How might the advertisements be improved?

NOTES

1. See the discussion on rank-in-job versus rank-in-person systems in Chapter 5. Rank-in-job positions have been the most common and emphasize technical skills. Rank-in-person systems (such as the military) emphasize employee development potential.

2. In true patronage positions, elected officials can select whomever they please without review. These often include staff positions. Appointive positions such as department heads and their chief deputies arguably are not true patronage positions because they are reviewed by the appropriate legislative body for confirmation. Of course, recruitment in elective positions is generally through the democratic process of primaries.

3. Employment statistics indicate that government has generally been a leader in hiring a diverse workforce. Meeting the requirements and documenting compliance with equal opportunity, affirmative action, age discrimination, and disability accommodation, however, has added to proceduralism.

4. Some examples do exist, of course. For years, the GAO has assigned senior executives to do annual campus visits (Walker, 2007).

REFERENCES


