

Recruitment & Selection: 'Psychometric' and 'Social Perspective' Model

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Abstract: To meet the global competition and changing nature of customer needs, human elements are important where recruitment and selection (R & S) is the first step of human resource management in the organization. It is no longer sufficient to be effective in selling a product or service on the reputation of the organization where competent and skilled workforce is urgent to recruit. In order to recruit and select human potentials from the possible source, some models are practised at the organization level. Though psychometric model is traditional one, it is widely used either in public or private institutions; and social perspective or exchange model is being taken into consideration as best practice in HRM. To overcome the limitations of psychometric model of R & S, academics and practitioners emphasize on social perspective model to recruit and select best suited persons for the organization. This article aims at discussing the importance of two models in R & S and providing a comparative analysis so that any recruiting agency can adopt a strategy combining the both model which can be conducive to the organization to recruit potential human resources.

1.0 Introduction

The intensity of global competition and the changing nature of customer needs mean that to deepen organisational growth, a mere reliance on effective selling of a product or service would be inadequate (Newell 2005). What this implies is that corporate growth is contingent on attracting and retaining people who can contribute meaningfully to organisational success. Employing competent individuals requires setting up effective recruitment and selection procedures designed to 'select the right individuals and reject the wrong ones' (Newell 2005). Poor selection decisions can be quite expensive in terms of time and cost involved in retraining poor performers, dealing with disciplinary cases and replacing wrongly selected individuals who leave shortly after resuming (Marchington & Wilkinson 2000). The psychometric model, with its 'person-job fit' approach, has been used by selectors and reinforces the 'good practice model of recruitment and selection' (Newell 2005:116). This paper critically examines the psychometric model's contribution to our understanding of recruitment and selection. It also investigates how the 'social perspective' has broadened the understanding of the realities of recruitment and selection methods.

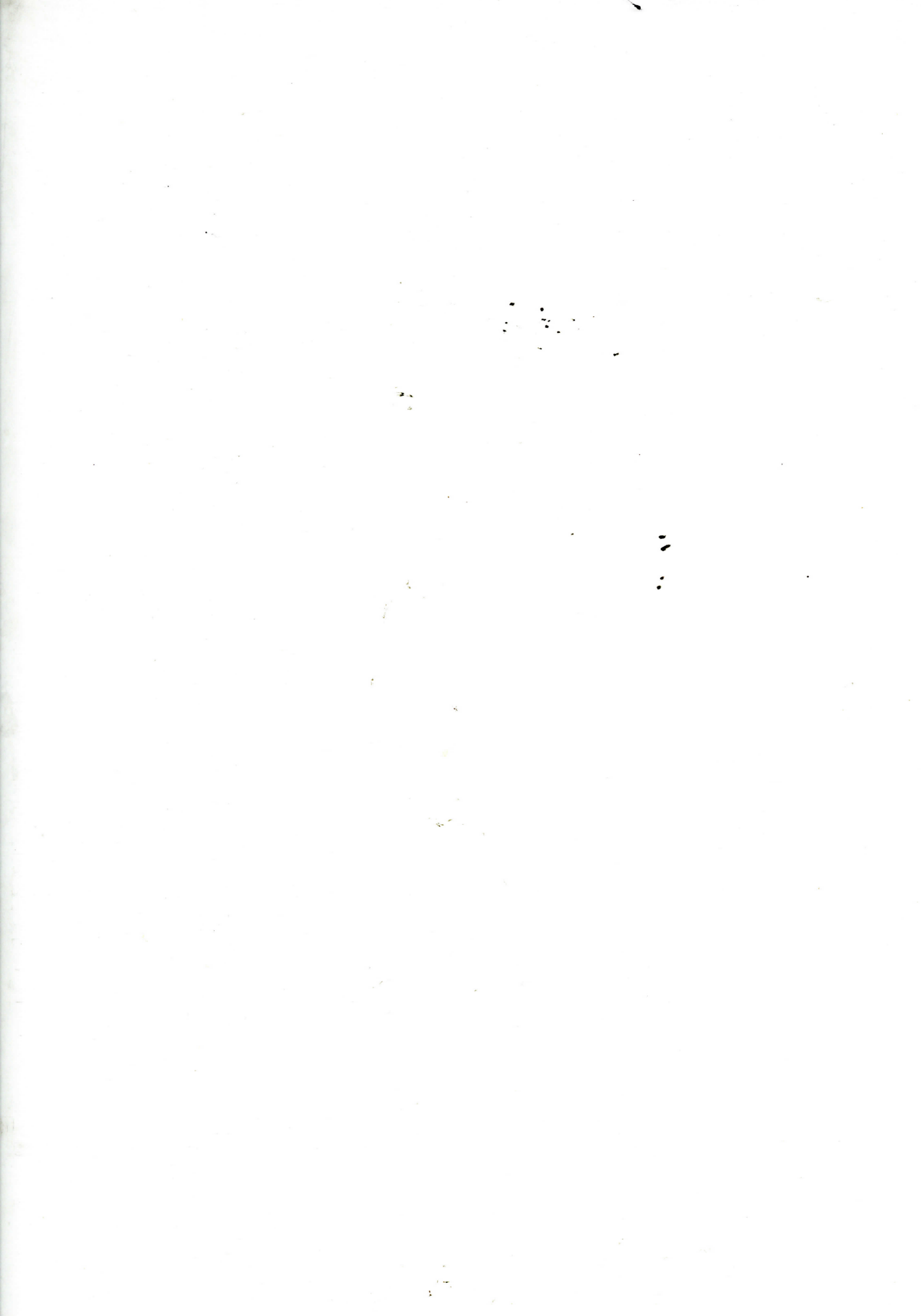
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2.0 Recruitment and Selection

Watson defines recruitment and selection as 'the processes by which organisations solicit, contact and interview potential appointees, and then establish whether it would be appropriate to appoint any of them (Watson, 1994:185). Traditionally, recruitment and selection has its roots in the psychometric model where the organisation attempts to correctly match an individual to a particular job (Newell, 2005). The recruitment and selection process constitutes a core activity within human resource management (HRM), and with the incorporation of the management of human resources into organisational strategy, it has since acquired a strategic intent (Millmore 2003). Strategic HRM is therefore concerned with acquiring, deploying and allocating human resources in a manner that gives the organisation a competitive edge (Wolf and Jenkins 2006). To deepen the understanding of this process, it is important to examine what the terms 'recruitment' and 'selection' really mean from the HRM perspective.

2.1 The Recruitment Process

Recruitment refers to the process of attracting individuals who are likely to have the attributes required to fill a specific role or job (Newell 2005). The recruitment process is usually triggered by retirement, promotion, resignation, transfer and dismissal or technological or product market changes (Watson 1994). The first stage in the recruitment process is the job analysis, which is a process that describes a 'job's content and complexity in such a way that the information can subsequently be used to define the required knowledge, skills and abilities, and other characteristics needed by applicants' (Wilk and Cappelli 2003:105). Marchington and Wilkinson identify observation, work diaries, questionnaires and interviews as the four techniques to use for analysing jobs but also state a lot depends on the cooperation of the job holders and the context within which the analysis occurs. A job analysis is important because the information generated from the activity forms the basis of the job description and the person specification (Taylor 2000). The second stage involves the development of a job description. This outlines the 'purpose of the job, the tasks, duties and responsibilities assigned to the job, expected performance standards, remuneration and reporting relationships (Newell 2005). The third stage is to do a person specification which incorporates the human attributes necessary to carry



out the job (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). Rodger's seven-point plan' and Munro-Fraser's fivefold grading system comprising impact on others, acquired qualifications, innate abilities, motivation and emotional adjustment are two main tools used in defining person specifications (Taylor 2000). However, because both frameworks are heavily dependent on 'personal judgement to determine what human qualities are associated with successful performance', a competency-based recruitment approach, emphasising job competencies rather than personal qualities is becoming quite prominent (Newell 2005). Attracting individuals who meet the requirements of the job specification is the next stage. Critical issues to consider include whether to recruit internally or externally, and the methods to adopt in attracting the right people. Sources of external applicants include employee referrals, employment agencies, 'walk-ins' and educational institutions while methods of attracting a suitable pool of applicants include advertising, corporate websites and employment agencies and job centres (Newell 2005).

2.2 The Selection Process

The selection process involves measuring differences between the candidates who have been attracted 'to find the person who has the profile which best matches the person specification as indicated by the job profile or description' (Newell 2005). Not only is selection a decision-making process, it is also a process of reciprocity between the employer and the candidate (Watson 1994). While it is the employer who offers employment to a candidate, the selection process is only concluded when that individual accepts the offer and reports for duty (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). Since the selection process entails collecting and ordering data and opinions from which decisions are made (Watson 1994), it is therefore important that employers choose appropriate methods in selecting candidates ((Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). The interview is the most popular method used to make selection decisions, although other methods are being applied to enhance the efficiency of the process (Newell 2005). The chosen methods are often determined by 'the employers' view of what is required to provide a satisfactory basis for decision-making and awareness of the appropriateness of particular techniques to provide what is sought' (Watson 2000:204). Marchington

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1. Physical make-up: no specific requirement; 2. Attainments: good academic qualification and some experience; 3. General intelligent: good intelligence; 4. Special attitudes: high verbal ability; 5. Interest: extra curriculum activities; 6. Disposition: dependable and sociable to the staff and incumbents & 7. Circumstances: must be prepared to do something anytime if needed.

and Wilkinson (2000) however argue that no matter how efficiently designed or administered, none of the methods can generate perfect selection decisions that predict with accuracy who will and will not perform effectively in a given role. In assessing the effectiveness of each method, Marchington and Wilkinson outline four major criteria. They are practicability, sensitivity, reliability and validity. There are various selection methods. The most notable are interviews, assessment centres and psychometric testing. Newell writes that the interview technique remains the most widely used. Assessment centres are also used as selection methods. For better understanding a brief description is stated herein below.

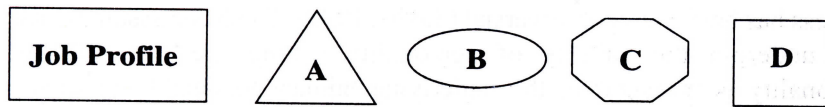
2.3 Assessment Centres

An assessment centre 'is not a single selection method, nor is it a place' but refers 'to the utilization of a number of different selection methods over a specified period' to enable 'multiple assessors to assess many candidates on a range of identified competences or behavioural dimensions (2005:136). Assessment centres are incorporated with a variety of methods including interviews, psychological tests, and core element is simulation of actual job tasks to observe job related behaviours (Cooper and Robertson, 1995). It is typically 1-4 days duration assessment. Here in-tray exercise and group decision making are common for managerial job. There are so much information and problems given in the tray where candidates have to take decision. Observers and interviewers are assigned to observe and mark on their ability of taking decision, personal interaction, stressfulness they feel, leadership quality etc. Even participants are also provided lunch, dinner, snacks with tea-coffee, while they are taking these they are being assessed. Formalities, style of having, introducing, gossiping, habit of dinning, sharing tendency etc are evaluated. Finally marks given by assessors are accumulated and decision is taken who will be selected. This process is very effective to select 'the right person for the right position'. This is now popularly used in developed countries including the UK. However it is very difficult to design and develop the whole system as this process involves huge tasks, materials and time as well.

3.0 The Psychometric Model

Recruitment and Selection is the prediction of future behaviour of candidates so that they can be most suitable for the organisation. Traditionally R & S is viewed as the process by which organisation tries

to match the individual accurately to the job that can be compared to completing a jigsaw puzzle. R & S is the process of selecting the correct piece of jigsaw (the right person) from the incorrect pieces (the wrong individuals) to fit into the particular hole in the jigsaw puzzle. In the figure D would be the best candidate for the job. So s/he will be chosen.



Candidates' Profiles

This referred to psychometric model. This approach has become quite popular, particularly in the UK, and it is regarded as crucially relevant in the quest to enhance the objectivity of the selection process (Newell 2005). In the psychometric paradigm, 'performance criteria are selected and individual attributes of various kinds (knowledge, skills, abilities, etc.) are chosen as predictors of job performance' (Iles 2001). The selected attributes are measured using a variety of procedures such as tests, interviews, and biodata while the process is then validated based on criterion-related predictive validity, which basically defines the efficiency of the predictor in predicting job performance (Iles, 2001). Ramsay and Scholarios (1999) write that three assumptions underpin the psychometric model: firstly, that 'good' or 'poor' performance in most jobs can be measured in terms of 'relatively stable, observable behaviours and static job demands'; secondly, that individual differences in human abilities are responsible for differences in job performance; and thirdly, that effective selection decisions are determined by 'efficient processing of information within organisations about job-related human capacities. These assumptions shape selection research. The model basically involves two types of testing: personality tests and cognitive or ability tests (Newell 2005). Rigorous procedures aimed at ensuring objectivity and reliability in psychometric tests have been developed to enable inferences proving the measures for predicting specific job behaviours are valid (Ramsay and Scholarios, 1999).

Cognitive or ability testing is becoming widely used and is far less controversial than the high-validity selection methods (Taylor 1998). Using meta-analysis, researchers have demonstrated that cognitive tests are 'valid predictors in a wide range of job situations' and that general intelligence predicts 'some of the performance variation in most job situations' (Newell 2005:134). Cognitive tests are superior to other selection methods and its utility across a range of job types, once

established as a valid measurement tool, is its major advantage (Taylor, 1998). Newell however states that for 'most jobs the range of intelligence of those applying for the job is likely to be restricted and that 'cognitive tests can be biased against certain groups' (Newell 2005:134).

The use of tests that purportedly measure personality in the selection process has been very controversial (Taylor 1998). The basic assumptions that underpin the validity of personality testing are that: human personality is measurable; the underlying human personality is stable over time and across different situations; individual jobs can be analysed based on the personality traits that would be preferable for the job to have; a personality questionnaire offers adequate information about an individual's personality (Taylor 1998:150). Newell argues that although research has shown that personality measurement can be useful 'when specific personality constructs are linked to specific job competencies' it is doubtful that personality tests alone will be 'good predictors of future job behaviour' because job situations can create situational pressures capable of minimising the variations in individuals' behaviours (2005:135).

The 'traditional' approach to organisational recruitment and selection is rooted in the psychometric model where effort is aimed at defining the kind of individual who will perform a specific job effectively and 'assessing applicants against defined personal attributes in order to establish a person/job fit' (Millmore 2003:87). Still on the issue of the traditional approach to recruitment and selection, Newell notes that the objective is to use selection methods with 'sound psychometric properties of validity and reliability' to predict 'good employees from bad employees' (2005:116). This psychometric approach of fitting the individual to a particular job has been the most influential position in practice and 'underpins the good practice model of recruitment and selection' (Newell 2005:116). The psychometric positions that individual attributes can predict individual performance, that attainment of corporate goals constitute performance criteria and the cost-effectiveness of using different selection procedures, are areas the model has influenced recruitment and selection (Iles 2001).

The integration of HRM into business strategy has led to the management of employee relations by HR professionals who have boosted the use of psychometric tests (Wolf and Jenkins, 2006). In three-quarters of the private sector organisations sampled by Wolf and Jenkins (2006), the HR professionals testified that psychometric test use was promoted to 'tighten

up the recruitment process and make procedures and criteria fit clear job and person specifications. With HRM integrated into organisational strategy, recruitment and selection, its core activity, also has to be strategically driven (Millmore 2003). The paradigm's postulation that individual differences in performance contribute to organisational differences has underpinned the development of HRM (Iles 2001). Using the psychometric model, organisations are able to do a proper person and job specifications which will guide them in their selection decisions while the test use will help to measure the individual attributes of applicants against those job/person specifications. Organisations keen on enhancing their overall performance will find the psychometric model useful in realising this corporate goal.

Extensive psychometric research has also formalised and professionalised selection practice in favour of procedures which promote 'objective and fair selection decision-making' (Ramsay and Scholarios, 1999:66). Based on their research findings, Wolf and Jenkins (2006) note that the use of the psychometric model has enabled organisation cope effectively with the changing legal and regulatory environment. Strict state regulations have encouraged organisations to use psychometric tests because of the need to defend their selection decisions as fair and objective in case they are challenged in a court or tribunal (Wolf and Jenkins 2006). The increased use of this method, according to Wolf and Jenkins, is as a result of 'the need for recruitment and selection procedures to be demonstrably relevant and demonstrably valid and reliable' and the model provides 'a powerful evidence for the presence of properly thought out and objective procedures' (2006:2002).

3.1 Critique of the Psychometric Model

The challenges of globalisation and the need for greater flexibility and innovation make the psychometric model's 'best practices' difficult for organisations to adopt (Newell 2005). The changing global economy requires employees to be generalists, capable of handling different roles needing a range of skills and competences and that where persons are recruited for a specific job, the job is likely to change (Newell 2005). This therefore questions the appropriateness of doing a job analysis to define the task and person requirements of a particular job. The model also stifles innovation since individuals have been selected based on whether they can do specific jobs efficiently and fit the corporate culture, and not necessarily whether they have the capacity to challenge the status quo as well as think and act differently (Newell 2005).

The political and legal implications of the psychometric model of assessment have questioned the 'fairness and validity of assessment and selection procedures' (Iles 2001:154). Some American court cases and tribunal court cases in the UK have ruled against companies because psychometric tests conducted discriminated against minorities (Wolf and Jenkins 2006). Newell (2005) blames the resulting discrimination on the model's 'one best way' assumption. Besides, cross-national differences make it difficult for organisations to replicate their home-base policies abroad as individuals from different nationalities may respond differently to psychometric tests (Newell 2005).

As organisations are often confronted with the need to change, decentralise or restructure, 'the conception of the job as a stable collection of discrete tasks has come under pressure' (Iles 2001:153). Iles argues that developments such as 'multiskilling, flexible specialisation, and self-directed work teams' have redefined the notion of a 'job' while 'career portfolios' have added new meanings to career development concepts. Newell (2005) also maintains that by presenting a static job profile, the paradigm emphasises personal attributes influencing job performance and de-emphasises the role as well as situational pressures thereby failing to capture change levels within organisations and situational influences on individuals. Selection is now represented as a 'process of exchange or negotiation' between the organisation and the potential employees. Service jobs such as call centre jobs where recruitment is based on personality and workers are required to perform according to predefined instructions give little opportunity for negotiation as the result is that the rigidity of the job creates high labour turnover (Newell 2005).

4.0 Recruitment and Selection from the Social Perspective

The recruitment and selection process is described as a 'socially constructed phenomenon, formed and sustained within a social context and impacting individual and organisational levels of functioning' (Ramsay and Scholarios 1999:76). From the social perspective, the selection process must be seen as a series of episodes within a social process involving and characterised by a mutual exchange of information between the organisation and the potential employees (Herriot 1984). Newell (2005) provides an outline of recruitment and selection from the social perspective. It starts with the organisation communicating its expectations of the kind of individual they would like to recruit and the type of job and work environment in which they will work. The information conveyed to potential applicants must contain both the

positive and negative aspects of the job and organisation. Having understood this information, potential recruits can then compare these details with their own personal expectations and goals, making it easier for them to decide whether or not to apply for the job. Herriot (1984) states that this process continues with the applicants communicating their readiness to enter into negotiations, and the organisation compares the applicants' self-presentation with its own expectations and decides whether or not to continue with the process. The interview stage is also an extension of the exchange process and both parties negotiate with each party possibly 'willing to adapt expectations in the light of similar concessions by the other' (Herriot 1984:56). The two parties should have adequate information about the assessment process and must be 'perceived as transparent' by 'providing candidates with honest and detailed feedback about their performance in the assessment process (Ramsay and Scholarios 1999:76).

The social perspective approach is different from the traditional mode of recruitment and selection where an exaggerated image of the organisation and possible career opportunities are presented to potential applicants (Newell 2005). As a result of this glossy portrayal of job opportunities by organisations, prospective applicants find it difficult to distinguish between organisations or determine 'suitable and unsuitable prospective employers' (Newell 2005:140). While the justification for this approach is the need to attract the best candidates ahead of competition, a major consequence is that new employees' expectations are not likely to correspond with the reality of the work environment and this may create a high turnover level. The traditional approach sees recruitment and selection as a one-way process of decision making, without a mutual giving and receiving of information between the organisation and the candidate (Newell 2005). However, the exchange approach requires the recruitment and selection process to be a platform for 'genuine exchange of valid and reliable information between both parties' with the aim of establishing 'whether there is a fit between the two sets of expectations' (Newell 2005:141). In the social exchange approach, both parties must have some control or involvement in the social episodes (Ramsay and Scholarios 1999:76). The social process therefore is a two-way process in which the organisation has to adapt its expectation in line with the individual's personal experience (Herriot 1984). Recruitment is not aimed at attracting 'a maximum number of good quality candidates' but intended to 'attract candidates most suited to the job and organisation' (Newell 2005:141).

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Iles (2001) states that the social perspective assumes that people undergo changes in the course of their careers in organisations, that subjective individual views influenced by assessment and selection procedures are important to motivation and performance. Selecting employees with the requisite competences actually marks the beginning and not the end of the process and subsequent interactions between the employee and the organisation, including the opportunities made available, will impact on commitment and turnover (Newell 2005). Iles (2001) argues that the accent on 'negotiation, interaction and mutual influence' is perhaps the reason behind the continued use of the interview, which creates room for mutual negotiation and decision making, by organisations in Europe. By locating recruitment and selection within a social context and identifying the influence of situational factors on the parties involved, the social perspective succeeds in deepening our understanding of the realities of the selection process.

5.0 Conclusion

With the addition of HRM into organisational strategy, more attention is now given to recruitment and selection and it is not surprising that it is now strategically oriented. Critical evaluation of the validity, reliability and utility of the various selection methods in choosing the best candidates for a position has been done within the realm of psychology (Wolf and Jenkins 2006). The psychometric approach, with its assessment of candidates against defined attributes to establish a person/job fit has greatly influenced traditional approach to recruitment and selection and remains dominant (Millmore 2003). However, its obvious weaknesses, especially in the light of globalisation and increased need for change, innovation and job flexibility, have led to recruitment and selection being seen in the light of a social perspective in which selection becomes a 'process of bilateral negotiations, rather than a one-sided process within the organisation alone' (Ramsay and Scholarios 1999:75). The social perspective identifies the social dimension of recruitment and selection, highlights the situational factors underpinning the process and declares that the socialisation process continues even after the individual has joined the organisation. While the social approach will help in recruiting individuals who can give a long-term commitment (Newell 2005), the opportunistic tendencies of organisations, including the fact that they have to recruit from a highly competitive graduate market might make it appear unattractive.

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