Techniques for Obtaining Job Applicant Information in Nigerian Organizations

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Abstract

With a pool of completed applications, the next step is to select the best persons for the job. This usually means whittling down in the applicant pool by using the screening tools such as application blank, selection and placement interview, written tests, reference verification and background checks, medical and physical tests. Past studies were consulted to gather relevant and adequate information concerning the study. The research concluded that the three most common methods that is, interviewing, written testing, and application blanks, must operate within legal regulations. The study recommended that Nigerian organizations should match individual skills, knowledge, and abilities to job demands while selecting applicants.

Key Words: Job, Applicant, Information, Selection, Techniques, Organizations, Management, Managers, and Employees.

Introduction

Selecting the right employees is important for three main reasons. First, managers performance always depends in part on his or her subordinates. Employees with the right skills and attributes will do a better job for him or her and the organization. Employee without these skills or who are abrasive or obstruction would not perform effectively, and the manager's own performance and the firm's will suffer. The time to screen out such undesirables is before, they are in the door, not after (Philip, 1993). Effective screening is also important because of it is costly to recruit and hire employees. Hiring and training even a clerk can cost more in fees and supervisory time. The total cost of hiring a manager could easily be 10 times as high, once search fees, interviewing time, reference checking, and travel and moving expenses are tallied. Okere (2019) believed that careful selection is also important because of the legal implications of incompetent hiring. For one thing, Equal Employment Opportunity legislation and court decisions require organization to systematically evaluate selection procedure's effectiveness to ensure that applicant is not unfairly discriminated especially against any protected group. Furthermore, courts are increasingly finding employers liable when employees with criminal records or other problems take advantage of access to customers' homes or other similar opportunities to commit crimes. Therefore, says Ann and Marjia (1991), hiring workers with such backgrounds without proper safeguards is called "negligent hiring". The recent increase in negligent hiring cases underscores the need for employers to carefully think through what the human requirements really are when doing a job analysis. For example, "non-rapist" is unlikely to appear as a required knowledge, skill, or ability in a job analysis of a repair person. Yet it is that type of requirement that has been the focus of many negligent hiring suits. Also, Ann and Marjia (1991) posit that it could be discriminatory to conclude that candidates with, say, conviction records are automatically not right for certain jobs. Hence, the fear of negligent hiring must be balanced with Equal Employment Opportunity concerns. Steps to take to protect against negligent hiring claims include:

1. Carefully scrutinize all information supplied by the applicant on his or her employment application. For example, look for unexplained gaps in employment.

2. Obtain the applicant's written authorization for reference checks from prospective employees, and check former employers, and also check former employers' references as carefully as possible.
3. Save all records and information obtained about the applicant during each stage of the selection process.
4. Reject applicants who make false statements of material facts in the application or who have records of conviction for offenses directly related and important to the positions in question.
5. Keep in mind the need to balance the applicants privacy rights with others need to know, especially when damaging information is discovered.
6. Take immediate disciplinary action if problems develop.

Clive (1993), argued that some information should not be gathered for making selection decisions, primarily because it can be used illegally to make discriminatory decisions. Such information is described in the following discussion of the ways to gather information.

Application Blank

Generally, application blanks or forms are used as a straightforward way of giving a standardized synopsis of the applicant's history. This helps applicants present their case by providing them with a predetermined structure, it speeds the sorting and short listing of applicants, and it guides the interviewers as well as providing the starting-point for personnel records. Being the first step in the selection process, is a form seeking information about the job applicant's background and present status, including current address and telephone number. Although application blanks in the past requested a great deal of information, often including a photograph, legal challenges have substantially reduced the data required. Exhibit 1 demonstrates an example of an application blank.

Exhibit 1: EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

DATE:_____
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:_____
TELEPHONE CO.:_____

NAME_____
LAST FIRST MIDDLE

ADDRESS_____
STREET CITY STATE ZIP

Position Desired_____ Are You 18 or Older _____ Date You Can Start _____

Are You Presently Employed?_____ If so, Where?_____

FORMER EMPLOYERS (Please list beginning with most recent)

DATE Month & Year	NAME & ADDRESS OF EMPLOYER	Telephone No. May We Call?	SALARY	POSITION	REASON FOR LEAVING

EDUCATION	NAME & LOCATION OF SCHOOL	YEARS ATTENDED	DATE GRADUATION	SUBJECT OF SPECIAL INTEREST
HIGH SCHOOL(S)				
COLLEGE(S)				
TRADE, BUSINESS				
OR CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS				

Do you have any physical defects that preclude you from performing any work for which you are being considered?

AVAILABILITY

Approximate Total Hours Available: ☐ 15-25 ☐ 35-45

	Weekdays	Weekends		Weekdays	Weekends		Weekdays	Weekends	
Mornings	☐	☐	Yes	Afternoons ☐	☐	Yes	Evenings ☐	☐	Yes
	☐	☐	No	☐	☐	No	☐	☐	No

Particular hours you will be unavailable to work and the reasons:

Continued

REFERENCES

Give below names of three persons not related to you, whom you have known at least one year.

NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPATION	YEARS KNOWN

I AUTHORIZE INVESTIGATION OF ALL STATEMENTS CONTAINED IN THIS APPLICATION. I UNDERSTAND THAT MISREPRESENTATIONS OR OMISSION OF FACTS CALLED FOR IS CAUSE FOR DISMISSAL. FURTHER, I UNDERSTAND AND AGREE THAT MY EMPLOYMENT IS FOR NO DEFINITE PERIOD AND MAY, REGARDLESS OF THE DATA OF PAYMENT OF MY WAGES AND SALARY, BE TERMINATED AT ANY TIME WITHOUT ANY PREVIOUS NOTICE.

DATE SIGNIATURE

INTERVIEWED BY DATE

However, because of the potential for producing disparate impact and the difficulty in demonstrating job-relatedness, certain information should not be requested in an application blank, including the following:

1. Clergy as references.
2. Number of children and who will care for them.
3. Height and weight, unless absolutely job-related.
4. Marital status.
5. Arrest record
6. Conviction record unless strongly related to job.
7. Nature of military discharge.
8. Citizenship.
9. Credit questions.
10. Relatives and friends working for the employer.
11. Age, sex, religion, and national origin.

Discretion must not only be used in gathering information on application blanks, but also in its use. Even with these prohibitions, application blanks can still yield a great deal of useful information.

Selection and Placement Interview

The interview is used almost universally as a selection device. The interview enables the person responsible for hiring to view the total individual and to appraise the person and his behaviour directly (Newstron, 1995). The effective interview involves two-way communication. It permits the interviewer to learn more about the applicant's background, interests, and values, and it also provides an opportunity for the applicant to ask questions about the organization and the job. Ideally, the interview says, Walker (1995), provides a valid sample of the applicant's behaviour. Even though the applicant is careful to present the best pictures of himself, the skilled interviewer can draw him out far more successfully than can an application blank. The seven main types of interviews used at work include structure, non-structured, situational, sequential, panel, stress, and appraisal. Each can be classified in one or more of four ways according to (1) how structured they are, (2) their purpose, (3) their content, that is, the types of questions they contain, and (4) the way they are administered (Werther, 1995). For many years, the ironic thing about interviews is that while used by virtually all employers, the earlier research gave selection interviews low marks in terms of reliability and validity. However, today studies affirm that the interview is generally a much better predictor of performance than previously thought and is comparable with many other selection techniques, (Laura and Ronald, 1996). The key, however, seems to be that this is true, especially if the interview is structured (Linda, 1998). Generally speaking, the research evidence suggests that structured interviews have reportedly validities about twice those of unstructured interviews (Michael, 1994). Thus, the key to an interview's usefulness is the manner in which it is administered, including the degree to which it is structured. With respect to predicting job performance, Michael (1994), observed that situational interviews yield a higher mean validity than do job-related, or behavioural interviews, which in turn yield a higher mean validity than do psychological interview. Okere (2019) argued that structured interviews, regardless of content, are more valid than unstructured interviews for predicting job performance. Although interviewing is the most widespread selection device, Byham (1978) claimed that regardless of the formal, several problems are inherent in interviews. Personnel can play a key role by making sure that persons doing the interviewing are aware of the problems, are trained in how to avoid them, and are reinforced for conducting interviews

correctly. The problems relating to interviews as a procedure for gathering information as well as for assessing it include the following:-

1. Managers as interviewers do not seek applicant information dimensions needed for successful job performance.
2. Especially with several interviewers, managers overlap in their coverage of some job-related questions and miss others entirely.
3. Managers may make snap judgements early in the interview.
4. Managers permit one trait or job-related attribute to influence their evaluation of the remaining qualities of an applicant.
5. Managers have not organized the various selection elements into a system.
6. Interviews have a tendency to be swayed by native information.
7. Information from applicant interviews is not integrated and discussed in a systematic manner.
8. Managers' judgements are often affected by the pressure to fill the position.
9. Managers' judgements regarding an applicant are often affected by the available applicants.

The following methods as discussed by Steven (1993) can help organizations overcome interview problems. They are ways to increase the reliability and validity of the interview.

1. Gather only job-related information.
2. Use past behaviour to predict future behaviour.
3. Coordinate the initial and succeeding interviews with each other and with other information-gathering procedures.
4. Involve several managers in interviewing and in the final decision.

Types of Interviews

Interviews can be categorized according the techniques and format used.

1. **Depth Interview:** The interviewer has only a general outline of topics to be covered and often pursues them in a rather unstructured fashion. Applicant as the interviewee may be allowed to expand greatly on any question asked. Because the quality of this interview often depends on the skill of the

interviewer, organizations often use a patterned or structured interview instead. In order to ensure consistency, this interview actually resembles an oral questionnaire. Because it is structured, validation studies indicate that the patterned interview can be effective in predicting job success.

2. **Panel Interview:** It occurs when several individuals interview one applicant. Because of the cost, panel interviews usually are reserved for managerial job applicants.
3. **Stress Interview:** It is used for certain managerial positions where it is important to remain calm and composed under pressure. In the stress interview, applicants may be intentionally annoyed, embarrassed, or frustrated by the interviewer to see how they react. Although this may be a good format for certain types of jobs such as those in law enforcement and the military, it appears to be less useful or job-related in most organizations.

Written Test

The use of tests in employment procedures is surrounded by strong feelings for and against. Those in favour point to the unreliability of the interview as a predictor of performance and the greater potential accuracy and objectivity of test data. Those against either dislike the objectivity that testing implies or have difficulty in incorporating test evidence into the rest of the evidence that is collected, (Robert and Helen, 1992). However, Wigdor and Garner (1982); Tenopyr (1981) suggest that written testing is another important procedure for gathering, transmitting, and assessing information about an applicant's aptitudes, experiences, and motivations. The most common types of written test measure aptitude, achievement, and personality, interests, and preferences.

1. **Aptitude Tests:** The potential of individuals to perform is measured by aptitude tests.
2. **Achievement Tests:** Achievement tests predict an individual's performance on the basis of what he or she knows. For example, admission to the legal profession is through the bar examination, and the medical profession is enhanced through medical boards. Paper-and-pencil tests are used in these cases because they are or are assumed to be, related to performance in the actual job.

3. **Tests Personality, Interests and Preferences:** Test designed to measure an individual's personality, interests, and preferences, may focus on the relationships of any one of them to certain types of jobs. Tests of the individual's traits or characteristics are sometimes referred to as personality inventories. Personality inventories are useful for predicting the performance of salesclerks, clerical workers, and the like. Placement and career counseling decisions can also be facilitated by interests test. Preference tests are especially useful in matching employee preferences with job and organizational characteristics.

Reference Verification and Background Checks

Most employers try to check and verify the job applicant's background information and reference. Some estimate that 95% of organizations now employ such background check (Edward, 1997) with the vast majority probably using telephone inquiries. The remainder use background sources like commercial credit-checking agencies and reference letters. There are two key reasons for conducting pre-employment reference and/or checks to vary the accuracy of factual information previously provided by the applicant and to discover damaging background information such as criminal records and suspended driver's licenses (Seymour, 1993). Lying on one's application is apparently not unusual. Also, Edward (1997), posit that it is not uncommon to find someone who applies and look good, and then if an employer do a little digging, he will start to see all sorts of criminal history. The most commonly verified background areas are legal eligibility for employment which include compliance with immigration laws; dates of prior employment, military service which discharge status; education and identification which include data of birth and address (Seymour, 1993). Thus, another way of gathering information is by reference verification and background checks. However, the recent trend, is to rely less upon this form of verification because providing references can result in violation of "Civil Rights Act" and/or bring charges of defamation of character. There is also the risk that refusing to hire an applicant who has an arrest or conviction record could result in a discrimination charge, but despite the risks of background checks, not doing so can prove costly as evidenced by recent spate of negligent-hiring lawsuits. Thus, one way of informing the judgement of managers who have to make employment offers to

selected individuals is the use of references and background checks. Previous employers or others with appropriate credentials are cited by candidates and then requested by prospective employers to provide information. There are two types: the factual check and the character reference. The factual check is fairly straight forward as it is no more than a confirmation of facts that the candidate has presented. It will normally follow the employment interview and decision to offer a post. It does no more than confirm that the facts are accurate. The knowledge that such a check will made, or may be made, will help focus the mind of candidates so that they resist the temptation to embroider their story. On the other hand, character reference is a very different matter. Here the prospective employer asks for an opinion about the candidate before the interview so that the information gained can be used in the decision-making phases.

Medical and Physical Tests

Once an offer is made and a person hired, a medical examination is usually the next step in the selection (Joseph, 1972). There are five main reasons for requiring pre-employment medical examinations. The examinations can be used to determine that the applicant qualifies for the physical requirements of the position and to discover any medical limitations that should be taken into account in placing the applicant. The examination will also establish a record and baseline of the applicant's health for the purpose of future insurance or compensation claims. The examination can, by identifying health problems, also reduce absenteeism and accidents and of course, detect communicable diseases that may be unknown to the applicant. The examination is usually performed by the employer's medical department in the largest organizations. Smaller employers retain the services of consulting physicians to perform such examinations, which are almost always paid for by the employer. In any case under the Nigerians with Disabilities Act, a person with a disability cannot be rejected for the job if he or she is otherwise qualified and if the person could perform the essential job functions with reasonable accommodation (Okere, 2019; Okere, 1995). Under the Act, a medical examination is permitted during the period between the job offer and commencement of work only if such examinations are standard practice for all applicants for that job category. Thus, physical or medical examination is often one of the final steps in the selection process. Many employers give common physical examinations to all

job applicants, whereas special examinations are given to only a subset of all the applicants. For example, production job applicants may receive back "X rays", while office job applicants may not. According to the Uniform Guidelines, physical examinations should be used to screen out applicants only when the results indicate that job performance would be adversely affected (Robert, 1987; Calvin et al, 1991). Novit (1981) highlighted that physical examinations can be used in conjunction with physical ability tests to help ensure that proper job accommodation is made and to provide a record for the employer in order to prevent employees filing worker compensation claims for preexisting injuries. A more recent use of the physical examination is to screen applicants based upon their genetic makeup. Genetic screening, as it is called, is based upon the premise that some individuals may be more sensitive to workplace elements such as chemicals (Olian and Snyder, 1984; Rothstein, 1984). The screening is done on the basis of an analysis of an applicant's blood sample.

Although not all organizations require medical examinations or physical tests, they are being given in increasing numbers in most Nigerian organizations (Okere, 1995). One consequence is a growing concern about genetic screening and invasion of privacy for non-job-related information as part of the physical examination process.

Drug Screening

Somewhat similar concerns have been raised about testing for drug and alcohol use. Drug abuse is a serious problem at work. Drug and alcohol testing of job applicants and employees is up, and further increases are likely, according to a survey of 221 organizations conducted by the American Society for Personnel Administration (Conference Policy Pointers, 1986). More than 25% of the respondents reported testing applicants specifically for drug use in 1986, compared with 17% in 1985. In addition, more than 18% of the surveyed companies said they were testing employees for drugs, up from 12% a year ago. Counselors at the Cocaine National Help Line polled callers of the 800-Cocaine hot line and found that 75% admitted to occasional cocaine use at work, 69% said that they regularly worked under the influence of a drug, and 25% recorded daily at work. In a study of long-distance truck drivers Scott et al (1993), found that over 62% reported using

drugs at least occasionally. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that employee drug and alcohol use costs U.S. employers over $60 billion each year in reduced productivity, increased accidents, increased sick benefits, and higher worker's compensation claims (Ian et al, 1987). More and more employers therefore, conduct drug screenings just before they are formally hired in Nigerian organizations. Many also test current employees when there is reason to believe the person has been using drugs after a work accident, in the presence of obvious behavioural symptoms, or in the face of chronic lateness or high absenteeism. Mark et al (1994) stressed that some firms routinely administer drug tests on a random basis or periodic basis, while others require drug tests when an employee is transferred or promoted to a new position.

Method Adopted

Literature survey method was adopted to collect information required for the study. The information obtained was qualitatively analyzed.

Conclusions

To match individual skills, knowledge, and abilities to job demands and individual personalities, interests, and preference to job and organizational characteristics, organizations need to gather information about applicants. The three most common methods, that is, interviewing, written testing, and application blanks, must operate within legal regulations. These legal regulations are not intended to discourage the use of these methods but rather to ensure that information is collected, retained, and used in recognition of an individual's rights to privacy and an organization's right to select individuals on the basis of legal considerations. Consequently, the types of information and the methods used to obtained information for selection vary according to the type of job for which the applicants are being selected.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following to enhance techniques for obtaining job applicant information in Nigerian work organizations.

1. Organizations should match individual skills, knowledge, and abilities to job demands while selecting applicants.

2. Application blank should be used to seek information about the job applicant's background and present status. However, certain information should not be requested such as clergy, height and weight, number of children, etc.
3. Discretion should not be used in gathering information on application blanks.
4. In addition to the application blank, employer may request a special handwriting sample.
5. Interview should be regarded as the main method of obtaining information especially if the job is a middle-level or upper-level managerial or executive position. Managers should not make snap judgements early in the interview.
6. In interview interviewer should gather only job-related information.
7. Written test should be used to gather, transmit, and asses information about an applicant's aptitudes, experiences, and motivations.
8. Some job applicants falsify their past and current qualifications. Therefore, organizations should turn to outside investigators and check past employers used as references. Also, applicants should submit to a lie detector or polygraph test as part of the selection procedure.
9. Physical or medical examination should be the final step in the selection process. It should be used in conjunction with physical ability tests to help ensure that proper job accommodation is made.
10. Since drug abuse is a serious problem at work, organizations should conduct drug screening before applicants are formally hired. Also, current employees should be tested when there is reason to believe the person has been using drugs after a work accident, in the presence of obvious behavioural symptoms, or in the face of chronic lateness or high absenteeism.

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