

## Effectiveness of human resource management practices in developing countries: a case study on recruitment practices

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### ABSTRACT

*Dunning (2006) asserted that international business research focused heavily on the physical assets of organizations and nations, thus neglecting the human environment of organizations and nations. Research has shown “the most important driver for economic advancement is knowledge” and is drawn from the human environment (Zhu et al., 2011, p. 312). The human environment is defined as the “human assets (i.e. creativity leading to innovation; experience, skills and knowledge of employees) and the skills and abilities those assets possess within a given location” (Zhu et al., 2011, p. 312). Thus, how an organization, including government, manages its human resources (HR), drawn from the human environment in which it operates, will significantly impact success or failure (Barney, 2001; Kong & Thomson, 2009). We contend that although there has been a great deal of research on human resource management (HRM) as a competitive advantage for firms, there has been little work done on the analysis of HRM practices in government and its influence on a nation’s competitive advantage. In a qualitative study of a developing nation in the Caribbean we interviewed 12 senior level employees. Our analysis revealed that little attention was paid to HRM, which resulted in the ineffectiveness of the application of government policies. The data revealed that issues started with the recruitment and selection processes. This paper focuses on the recruitment and selection processes utilized by government agencies that cause institutional voids which lead to the failure to utilize public service employees as a source of competitive advantage.*

**Keywords:** Human resource management, recruitment, HPWS, developing countries, government departments, Grenada

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## INTRODUCTION

Dunning (2006) asserted that international business research focused heavily on the physical assets of organizations and nations, thus neglecting the human environment of organizations and nations. Research has shown “the most important driver for economic advancement is knowledge” and is drawn from the human environment (Zhu et al. 2011, p. 312). The human environment is defined as the “human assets (i.e. creativity leading to innovation; experience, skills and knowledge of employees) and the skills and abilities those assets possess within a given location” (Zhu et al. 2011, p. 312). Thus, how an organization, including government, manages its human resources (HR), drawn from the human environment in which it operates, will significantly impact success or failure (Barney 2001; Kong & Thomson 2009).

Human resources of any organization regardless of whether it is for-profit, non-for-profit or a government entity are considered a key asset. The effective management of these resources then leads to competitive advantages which brings the organization success in their endeavors. Research has shown that it is not one HRM practice that when implemented leads to success but a series of interrelated practices. These have been labeled high performance work systems (HPWS). They are composed of various HRM practices including recruitment, selection, training, performance management and compensation. Broadly defined, HPWS are coherent HRM practices that improve overall organizational performance through making employees more committed and involved to the organization and its goals (Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh 2016). Research has shown that compared to traditional HR practices, HPWS illicit superior results (Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh 2016). Instead of looking at the HR practices and other business units of an organization as separate, HPWS strive to create unified processes in business. Under a HPWS, managers and employees are encouraged to incorporate work practices that encourage them to work together in a way that it mutually beneficial, and beneficial to the organization as a whole (Riaz 2016). Strong human capital, made superior through HPWS, is crucial to an organization’s success (Chopra & Chopra 2012). HPWS have been shown to lead to positive moral amongst employees, greater innovation, and higher profitability (Riaz 2016).

We contend that although there has been a great deal of research on human resource management (HRM) as a competitive advantage for firms, there has been little work done on the analysis of HRM practices in government and its influence on a nation’s competitive advantage. Under an HPWS approach, the civil service sector should not view recruitment as a discrete and separate process, but should instead view it in the larger realm of the organization. In short, although recruitment is a vital part of HRM and an organization’s success, it should be viewed as interrelated part in the holistic picture of an organization. In order to be most successful, public sector employers must integrate and unify employee recruitment alongside other business processes.

In order to fulfill our mandate of uncovering steps in effective HRM practices in developing nations' government entities this paper delves into the first aspect of an HPWS – recruitment.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section of the paper will provide a review of recruitment strategies for the public sector as espoused in academic literature. Recruitment is a pivotal part of HRM, and is essential to ensuring that skilled, competent, and desirable individuals are attracted to an organization. Organizations that effectively recruit top talent can gain a competitive advantage, through superior human capital, over those who lack such skills (Sangeetha 2010). For example, how have Apple, AT & T, and Exxon Mobil all surpassed their competitors to be market leaders? One of the commonalities of these organizations is their ability to secure top talent, who in turn, drive these businesses to success. At a fundamental level, human capital ensures the effective running of an organization, marketplace competitiveness, and overall longevity of any business. At the grassroots of strong human capital is the recruitment of such talent (Dădârlat & Dumitrașcu 2015). From the above facts, one can conclude that recruitment is a vital step for all organizations. This portion of the paper will follow as such: a brief overview of recruitment, examples of poor recruitment strategies, and examples of effective recruitment strategies.

### **Definition of Recruitment**

Recruitment is a process by which an organization identifies and attracts a pool of candidates that wish to gain employment with the organization for a specific job (Abrokwah, Yuhui, Agyare & Asamany 2018; Asseburg, Homberg & Vogel 2018; Herstad, Sandven & Ebersberger 2015; Rynes 1991). Recruitment is considered one of the major functions of HRM, and is used to attract and select the most suitable individuals for a position or organization (Asseburg, Homberg & Vogel 2018; Herstad, Sandven & Ebersberger 2015; Rehman 2012).

Recruitment is not a static process or concept; thus, it is shaped by its context. The size of an available labour pool as well as skills and education levels of that a labour pool dictates the strategies an organization can use. However, other factors such as religion and other cultural nuances can influence recruitment strategies. Globalization has caused the diversity within populations to increase and countries find that their civil service may not reflect that increased diversity. A firm can utilize internal recruitment techniques, as well external recruitment methods, depending on what the organization wishes to achieve (Amegashie-Viglo 2014) to overcome changes in the environment in which they serve. Recruitment is not stagnant because the environment in which an organization operates is not stagnant and should be altered to best meet the ongoing needs. However, it is important to recognize what may prove beneficial for one firm does not guarantee success

for another (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Based on this finding, organizations, including the public sector, must carefully analyze the environment in which they operate, and desired end goals when selecting and implementing an appropriate recruitment strategy.

### **Poor Examples of Recruitment**

It is important to note that the states used as case studies here are not as economically successful as other nations solely due to their HRM policies and implementation. There are, of course, other factors that play a role; however as stated above, the effectiveness of HRM plays a major role in the success. These cases highlight very specific parts of the countries' public service HRM policies and that either due to the policy or poor implementation or application of that policy may not be led to the most efficient choices. The first case highlights Malaysia, while the second examines the evolution of Georgia's public sector recruitment strategies. Understanding the shortcomings of a country's HRM policies is crucial to improving future policies and procedures for long-term public service effectiveness.

#### **Malaysian Civil Service**

Malaysia is an interesting case study for HRM and recruitment strategies. The country is multiethnic however the majority of the population is Malay. A concern of the Malaysian Public Service Commission (MPSC) was that the public service was becoming increasingly homogenous. Yet, the demographics reflected the multiethnic diversity. The MPSC saw an overwhelming increase in the number of Malayan applicants and successful Malayan applicants as opposed to all other ethnicities (Woo 2015). This trend was seen despite efforts of the MPSC to innovate recruitment practices to be more appealing to non-Malayan applicants. The trend of favoring Malayan applicants was worrisome for many reasons, and suggested a flaw in the recruitment strategies. The non-neutrality of the recruitment process can be seen as a hindrance to success. Research has shown that heterogeneous workforces often performed better than homogenous groups, had improved group processes, improved innovation, and positive psychological effects on group members (Bear & Woolley 2011). Moreover, recruitment has been deemed crucial to increasing diversity in organizations (Broughton & Strebler, 2008). It has also been suggested that the increasingly homogenous public service of Malaysia weakens trust of the fairness and legitimacy of the public service that serves a diverse ethnic population. The above findings suggest that its homogenous workforce, which stems from ineffective, bias recruitment techniques, hinders Malaysia's public service's effectiveness.

#### **Georgian Civil Service**

Another example of an organization with an evolving HRM department is the Georgian public service. Georgia has seen dramatic change in its public service due to multiple government changes, tensions with Russia, and past

system inefficiencies. The most recent government in the region has aimed to create a career-based public service, in which applicants would be recruited and selected in a professional and transparent way (Abashidze & Selimsdhvili 2015). However, several problems plague the Georgian public sector. The first is the criticism that the Georgian government avoids open competition for vacant positions, which raises concerns of nepotism and corruption in the civil service. Part of the reason for this finding is that recruitment is often based on a loyalty to the leader approach; instead of recruiting applicants based on qualifications and motivation (Abashidze & Selimsdhvili 2015). Moreover, qualifications for posted vacancies are easily manipulated to fit the experiences and skills of existing bureaucrats, which discourages outside applicants from applying for jobs, and often leads to predetermined results of who will get a position (Abashidze & Selimsdhvili 2015). In many nations, corruption and nepotism are concerns for public sector employment. For example, in Cambodia, despite efforts to create a meritocratic recruitment system, nepotism and patronage plague the system (Moon & Hwang 2013). Similarly, in China, high ranking public positions can be bought, and thus, is not fair in recruitment (Moon & Hwang 2013). These nations have become aware of the adverse effects of non-neutral, and corrupt recruitment and selection strategies, and vowed to create more transparent recruitment processes (Moon & Hwang 2013).

In Georgia a scheduled enactment for a law for the Georgian civil service in January 1, 2017, has aimed at, among other things, establishing neutrality and merit based recruitment and promotion in the civil service (Abashidze & Selimsdhvili 2015). The was predicated on the understanding that merit based recruitment is associated with less corruption, and can have overall positive effects on the workforce (Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen 2016). In theory, this legislation demonstrates strength but in actuality, there appear to be flaws. For example, the centralization of recruitment is an aim of this process. However, if organizations within the civil service continue to make decisions independently and in a decentralized manner; this will undermine the purpose of a centralized recruitment strategy, and impede the effectiveness of such a program (Abashidze & Selimsdhvili 2015). In short, the Georgian civil service is making promising strides towards strong HRM and recruitment processes. But it still faces serious obstacles in the path to achieving their end goals due to systemic issues caused by the culture ingrained within the system from previous eras.

### **Case Studies of Best HRM Practices**

To understand and create appropriate HRM recruitment strategies, analyzing both poor and strong examples is beneficial. This portion of the text will focus on some best HRM recruitment strategies found within the public service across the global. The purpose of the cases is to provide contrast to the aforementioned cases, to highlight some best practices that are implemented in nations with strong public services. Next, commonly found best recruitment

strategies will be discussed and analyzed. Although recruitment is contextual, understanding success from different environments can still be beneficial in determining an organization's strategy moving forward.

### **Asia-Pacific Recruitment**

Many Asia-Pacific nations have several strong and shared HRM recruitment strategies. Many states, including Korea and Japan, use open-competitive exams to recruit, screen, and select applicants (Moon & Hwang 2013). China also introduced a recruitment strategy, in which it recruits through two main methods: internal posting, and open recruitment (Zhang & Zhou 2010). In 1993, China reintroduced its examination system for entry level public service positions to ensure a more transparent, fair process for the initial selection of external employees (Jarrett & Huihan 2009). Such system, in theory, helps to eliminate the issues of corruption in recruitment and selection of Chinese public sector employees. Similarly, in Indonesia, the civil service tested a pilot program of computer-based exams to fairly and objectively recruit and select applicants (Moon & Hwang 2013). Overall, one can see that there is a common trend towards transparent and unbiased recruitment and selection in Asia-Pacific nations.

With that being said, there are differences among Asia-Pacific countries in regards to their recruitment strategies for public servants. For example, Western countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the US have decentralized recruitment strategies, whereas Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan utilize centralized recruitment strategies (Moon & Hwang 2013). Decentralized recruitment refers to recruitment in which various departments recruit their own personnel, while centralized recruitment refers to one department in charge of recruitment (Adams, Heiney, Brandt, Wirth, Khan, Johnson & Hebert 2015). Another difference is in the requirement of educational qualifications to write civil service employment examinations. Korea utilizes such an exam. The exam is difficult, competitive, and those who pass the exam typically have high levels of knowledge in economics, public policy, and public administration (Lee & Lee 2014). Similar exams are used in most Asia-Pacific nations, but who can write certain exams varies. For example, in Korea, there are no educational requirements to write the civil service exam, but in Malaysia and Singapore, certain position and levels of examinations are restricted based on educational qualifications (Moon & Hwang 2013). Although these states have both implemented and utilize meritocratic examinations, the openness and availability of who can write such exams varies, and highlights the difference in the recruitment strategies among these countries.

### **Singapore Recruitment**

Singapore is an example of a nation that has flourished largely due to its strong public sector. Many have stated that Singapore is a "brain gain nation," that has gained a competitive advantage over other countries' public sectors

due to its ability to recruit, attain, and retain top talent (Toh & Jiang 2012, p. 42). One of the key features of Singapore's ability to recruit top talent to the public service is the diversified recruitment strategies. There are four main ways that Singapore recruits local talent: open recruitment, pre-service scholarships, green harvest, and scouting and headhunting (Poocharoen & Lee 2013). This multitude of approaches to recruiting helps Singapore's civil service to diversify its talent pool, and thus, can help to create a more talented, robust civil service. For example, the Public Service Commission (PSC) of Singapore offers scholarships to entice the best and the brightest to apply for public service positions. Once the recipients graduate they are bonded to work in the civil service for a fixed number of years (Quah 1995). A unique finding of the scholarships is that there are no restrictions on the field of study which applicants must be in to apply (Poocharoen & Lee 2013). Eliminating such barriers and creating an open competition is a valuable tool to recruit diverse applicants. This method is just one way that Singapore ensures that top talent is interested in the public sector.

It has been commonly found, although not universal, that diverse workforces can perform better than homogenous workforces (Oliveria & Scherbaum 2015). This is largely because a homogenous workforce may suffer from groupthink, in which there is an unspoken consensus amongst all team members; because everyone is like-minded, innovation, new ideas, and improvement may be stifled (Oliveria & Scherbaum 2015). Therefore, having diverse talent is often beneficial for organizations. Singapore's public service has realized the necessity of a diverse workforce, and beyond recruiting diverse local talent, has committed itself to attracting top international talent. One way, in which the Singapore government has attempted to appeal to global talent is through creating value chain governance, in which there are upward opportunities, local support networks, and other complementary factors to make life in Singapore and the civil service attractive for foreign talent (Toh & Jiang 2012). Moreover, the Singaporean public service treats their public service as a competitive business to other nations' public services. Therefore, to make Singapore the employer of choice, Singapore offers higher rewards to skilled applicants than other countries (Toh & Jiang 2012). Therefore, international scholarships, such as the Singapore International Graduate Award for PhD students, are available to foreigners as incentive to join the Singapore public service (A\*STAR n.d.). The purpose behind the scholarship, as stated by the Agency for Science, Technology & Research (A\*STAR) is to create mutual relationships with foreign talent, and to bring young talent closer together (A\*STAR n.d.). Moreover, the Singapore government is a champion of openness to foreigners, and has gone as far as to create buildings, institutions, and an overall aesthetic and cultural feeling of familiarity within Singapore for foreigners in order to attract top talent to the state (Toh & Jiang 2012).

### **EU Recruitment Strategies**

Similar to the previous examples, there are similarities and differences among many EU member states' recruitment policies and procedures. One commonality found amongst most EU member states was that applicants are recruited based on a merit-based approach focusing on competencies, knowledge, behavior, and reasoning; (Ciobanu 2015). There are differences in more specific parts of recruitment among EU states. For example, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, for the most part, use what is called a position based system, in which civil service recruitment is similar to the of the private sector; applicants are recruited for a specific position, but can openly apply for other vacant positions in the public service (Ciobanu 2015). Another approach used by some member states is the career-based system, which aims to create a common culture within the civil service, and favours internal mobility as opposed to external recruitment (Kuperus 2010). However, many member states are combining these two approaches to create a kind of hybrid approach to recruitment. Countries that have a career-based system are, among other things, opening up their recruitment strategies to pursue outside talent, while those who currently utilize position-based systems are now willing to seek internal talent as opposed to outsourcing for all vacant positions (Kuerus 2010). These findings suggest that there is no one perfect solution to recruitment strategies, and many EU nations are successful while utilizing different approaches to recruitment.

Similar to Asia-Pacific nations, there is no universal finding amongst EU member states' approach to centralize vs. decentralize recruitment. Recently, Iceland, Denmark, and the Netherlands have invested heavily in decentralizing recruitment strategies (Ciobanu 2015). Countries including Denmark, Germany, and Sweden have utilized and succeeded in using decentralized recruitment and selection strategies, while Austria, Hungary, and France used mixed recruitment strategies (Ciobanu 2015). Belgium on the other hand has a centralized recruitment strategy. Here, the public sector must use SELOR as their recruitment agency (OECD 2012). These findings highlight that there is no universally found recruitment strategy among EU member states, but that the different approaches have proved successful for different countries.

### **Commonly Found 'Best' HRM Policies – Recruitment**

There were various strategies shared between countries, but the paper will focus on a couple key findings. One such finding was that accurate job information is crucial for recruitment. Another key insight was that applicant motivation is important, and can have a large impact on an applicant's success in an organization. Next, the use and necessity for public sector HRM policies and procedures to be flexible will be discussed. There will also be an explanation as to the evolution and utility of executing proper e-recruitment techniques. Lastly, the benefit and necessity of meritocracy and fairness in recruitment will be discussed. Countries that actively demonstrate the above principals may prove to have a significant HRM advantage over those that lack such competencies.



### **Accurate Job Information**

Accurate information about available jobs, as well as information about the potential employing organization, is important to successful recruitment. Without such information, applicants may avoid an organization as they are unsure of if they are qualified, what the responsibilities and scope of the position is, and whether or not they would be good fits within the organization itself. In the Pakistani public sector, various HRM policies, including recruitment, resulted in improved job satisfaction and lower employee turnover (Rehman 2012). In previous research studies, it has been demonstrated that accurate and realistic job descriptions is positively correlated with employee retention, job satisfaction, and work performance (Meglino, Ravlin & De Nisi 2000). This finding is largely due to the fact that applicants who were exposed to more accurate job descriptions felt more comfortable about their knowledge, skills, and abilities in regards to their potential position (Rehman 2012). Therefore, Rehman's research study on the success of the Pakistani civil service suggests that at the start of any recruitment process, an accurate and realistic job description is a vital role to attaining top talent.

### **Motivation**

Another facet of strong recruitment practice for the public sector is accounting for applicant motivation. More specifically, in the public sector, public service motivation (PSM) is an important tool that recruitment efforts should be aware of. PSM is a crucial factor for applicants in deciding whether to pursue public service or private employment (Chen, Hsieh & Chen 2014). PSM is defined as an individuals' motivation to do good for society through the delivery of public services and is key in creating a common purpose among public sector employees (Austen & Zacny 2015; Jang 2015). It can greatly enhance worker job satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, and can reduce employee turnover (Chen, Hsieh & Chen 2014).

In Canada, the Public Service Employment Act (PSEA) states that merit and non-partisanship are mandatory aspects of recruitment and selection (Kernaghan 2011). To this point, the PSEA includes PSM in the definition of merit. The Canadian civil service believes that higher levels of PSM leads to increased job satisfaction and increased organizational commitment, and thus, superior organizational performance (Kernaghan 2011). To achieve this end, the PSEA has made merit and motivation central to recruitment to ensure that nepotism, bias, corruption, and other unfair recruitment strategies are eliminated, while well-rounded recruitment techniques are utilized (Kernaghan 2011). Furthermore, a flexible recruitment strategy can be used to ensure that PSM is accounted for. Research has shown that, as long as systems are not abused and institutional capacities can handle the process, commonly found competitive exams may not be the most meritocratic way to select employees (Sundell n.d.). Instead, recruitment processes that use a combination of exams, CV screening, and interviews may be more fair and accurate, as it can account

for more intangible, intrinsic characteristics of applicants (Sundell n.d.). Again, this more flexible, mixed system of recruitment requires institutional capacities to be successful, and is subject to various other variables that could affect effectiveness, and thus, must be considered within the country of utilization for suitability. However, as the findings above suggest, PSM can add a beneficial layer to create a more well-rounded recruitment process.

### **Flexibility**

In the competitive, fast-paced nature of today's world, flexible HRM and recruitment strategies are crucial to the public sector's success. While many think of the public sector as highly bureaucratic, static, and non-adaptive, these organizations must evolve to the changing nature of the environment. Public services that are able to adjust their HRM practices can gain a competitive advantage over those who fail to do so (Do, Yeh & Madsen 2016). As mentioned above, there is no perfect, everlasting solution to creating the best HRM recruitment strategy especially with internal and external environments constantly changing. This means that government agencies must shake off the bureaucratic and non-adaptive ways to meet the rising challenges and the obstacles thereof. Change should not be just for the sake of change, but instead, should be based upon an analysis of internal and external environments, human resource needs, and proceed accordingly (Broughton & Strebler 2008).

As opposed to being reactive and only changing policies and procedures to keep up with trends, organizations need to be proactive. To stay competitive the public sector HRM strategies should focus on ongoing environmental and organizational analyses that in turn, reflect implementation of small, continuous incremental changes to recruitment strategies (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Research has shown that organizations which adapt more quickly and effectively than competitors will prove to have a competitive advantage (Datsyk, Podgornava, Grudina & Avdonina 2016).

### **Procedural Changes**

There are two main ways in which HRM policies, including recruitment, can be evolved: procedural changes, and process changes. Procedural changes are changes to HRM policies with the goal of simplifying and easing application processes for applicants, while making the organization more appealing to applicants in various ways (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Examples of procedural changes include: the elimination of arbitrary rules and regulation, screening applicants quickly, and instituting worker-friendly personnel policies (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Eliminating arbitrary rules for recruitment can be a step forward in gaining a larger number of applicants, as well as a more diverse applicant pool. For example, the US public service recently eliminated, or in some cases altered, a rule that stated that hiring managers in the public service could only select from a limited number of candidates (Lavigna & Hays 2004). As a result of eliminating such constraints, applicant pools are now

larger, which results in more diverse talent, greater selection for vacant positions, and overall, superior recruitment and selection opportunities.

Another procedural change utilized by flexible organizations is faster recruitment. There have been various countries whose public sectors have realized the need for more streamlined recruitment processes, such as in the USA (O'Leary, Lindholm, Whitford & Freeman 2002) and India (Purohit & Martineau 2016). Research has indicated that slow, ineffective recruitment and selection can be detrimental to organizations seeking top talent. India's civil service recognized a challenge in recruiting the needed number of government doctors (Purohit & Martineau 2016). Further analysis of this problem uncovered that inefficient and slow recruitment and selection was a major reason for a lack of qualified applicants. The slow processes led to frustrated and demotivated applicants, which in turn led to fewer applicants, as well as increased recruitment costs due to overall inefficiencies in the recruitment process (Purohit & Martineau 2016). Given the increased competition for human capital amongst an ever-globalizing market, faster recruitment of top talent by competing organizations, and other pressures led American public service to update and make its recruitment process faster by using online e-recruitment practices. This meant applicants could apply for jobs more quickly and jobs could be posted, updated, and applicants screened more quickly (O'Leary, Lindholm, Whitford & Freeman 2002). Overall, the US civil service benefitted drastically from enhanced recruitment results (O'Leary, Lindholm, Whitford & Freeman 2002).

Australian public sector recruiters have realized that they compete with private sector organizations for top talent; therefore, the public sector must make itself the employer of choice in order to recruit and attain that talent. One way in which the Australian civil service has done this is by creating and showcasing its worker-friendly policies (WFP) (Whitehouse & Zetlin 1999). WFP, also known as work-life balance, family-friendly employment, and so on, are organizational policies that aim to create working conditions in which employees feel that they can manage and enjoy both their work lives and personal lives in harmony. WFP includes flexible work hours, flexible work locations, such as from home, and reduced work hours (Chou & Cheung 2013). The overall goal of such policies is to create working conditions in which individuals can both participate in the labour market while being able to enjoy life outside of work more fully (Widener 2007). An employer who has such policies may be more attractive than one who lacks such policies, as individuals may seek more well-rounded lifestyles. The Australian public sector has recognized this trend, and has adapted its recruitment strategies accordingly. The WFP include true work-life balance, encouraging and supporting employees to constantly achieve higher and more diverse education, and creating an ethical work environment (Lee & Hong 2011). Through these policies, the public sector has come to gain the reputation as a place where people want to work due to the well-rounded, employee driven

policies of the organization, which in turn leads to larger, talented applicant pools for recruitment and selection (Widener 2007).

### **Process Changes**

Briefly defined, process changes alter and improve the ways in which HRM policies and services are delivered (Lavigna & Hays 2004). As previously noted, public sector recruitment techniques have often been universally labeled as slow and ineffective. Instead of being proactive and efficient, many view this sector's strategies as reactive and unresponsive (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Beyond procedural changes, process changes offer a way in which HRM can be changed in order to better meet the needs of the organization and better recruit and attract applicants. Process changes include decentralization of HRM, more aggressive outreach efforts for new employees, and the effective use of technology in recruitment (Lavigna & Hays 2004). These fundamental changes to HRM policies and procedures can help organization to maintain their relevance and competitiveness in the marketplace.

The decentralization of HRM is becoming a commonly found phenomenon. This process is characterized by giving HR responsibility to outside agencies, and managers outside of HR departments creating multiple points of entry into an organization (Lavigna & Hays 2004). The concept behind decentralized decision-making is a greater number of individuals share ideas, evaluate options, and implement those ideas which can lead to superior results drawing from a greater amount of human capital and knowledge available for any given situation (Neal & Spetzler 2015). Decentralization of HRM departments has occurred in Sweden, Switzerland, Australia, and to a lesser degree, in Canada, the US, and the Netherlands (Shim, 2001; Lavigna & Hays 2004). However, context is an important moderator in the decentralization decision and decentralization may not be the best route for all nations to pursue in given contexts. Moreover, several research studies have suggested that although many nations have stated that they are pursuing and have implemented decentralized HRM policies, in reality, these countries are still highly centralized in many of their HRM policies and procedures (Meyer & Hammerschmid 2010). In particular, many Eastern and Southern European states have implemented decentralized HRM policies, yet non-HR managers still see little to no autonomy in decision-making in regards to recruitment (Meyer & Hammerschmid 2010). This finding suggests that although many nations have suggested that decentralization of HRM is their preferred course of action for their public services, that their actions and realities of HRM in the public sector do not always reflect this idea.

Many public sector HRM departments now utilize more aggressive recruitment and outreach efforts. Examples of such efforts include government recruiters who travel to universities and job fairs, increased use of online and print media, and efforts to make sure that applicants are informed of application progress throughout the duration of that process (Lavigna & Hays

2004). Many public services are able to attract and recruit more talent through these means by ensuring that additional resources are put towards recruitment efforts, such as increased budgets for advertisement, hiring full-time recruiters, and outsourcing for additional help in recruitment and selection from various agencies (Lavigna & Hays 2004). An example of a country with aggressive outreach efforts is Singapore. As previously mentioned, the Singaporean government and public sector have continuously stressed the need to attract top talent both domestically and internationally (Toh & Jiang 2012). Therefore, these organizations have created scholarships, working conditions, and various streams of communication to ensure that potential applicants are made aware of and drawn to the Singaporean public service (Toh & Jiang 2012). Overall, the Singaporean government and public service have dedicated a large amount of resources towards attracting and recruiting talent for their public sector employment. Similarly, many nations have dedicated efforts towards online recruitment techniques to ensure that job vacancies are made available to a large number of people. For example, the Canadian public service posts jobs on an online website (Government of Canada 2019). On this website, candidates can view jobs, check their eligibility for jobs, receive updates from the Government of Canada public sector job forum, and send questions to experts at any time (Government of Canada 2019). The aim of a government job website such as this is to make job posting easily accessible to potential employees, as well as providing on-going support and resources for individuals interested in working in the public sector. These efforts are implemented with the hope of attracting top talent, and keeping potential applicants motivated and informed throughout the process.

A process change is the use of technology. Research has stated that many HRM and recruitment strategies can be expanded, enriched, and complemented by technology (Lavigna & Hays 2004). As the market and technologies evolve, so must organizations' recruitment strategies. In the last two to three decades, organizations have seen a shift from traditional to e-recruitment techniques (Radhika & John 2016). Traditionally, many organizations relied on physical recruiters, local media recruitment streams, and other geographically limited means of recruitment (Radhika & John 2016). However, the emergence of the internet in the 1990s changed the way in which recruiters must act. There are various positive outcomes for e-recruitment. Firstly, organizations can now recruit and attract a greater number of potential applicants, as job posting are made available globally through the web, as opposed to geographically constrained means (Llorens 2011). Similarly, employers can host virtual recruitment sessions, online video advertisements, can receive online resumes, and can conduct online competency examinations (Llorens 2011; Nasreem, Hassan & Khan 2016). Research has shown that e-recruitment has positive impacts on an applicant's opinion of the attractiveness of the organization (Hafeez & Farooq 2017). Similarly, in the US, states whose public sectors has effective, usable e-recruitment techniques saw significantly more applicants per job posting than

those states who lacked such mechanisms. Moreover, those states that had high-quality e-recruitment content saw less voluntary turnover than other states (Selden & Orenstein n.d.). Lastly, among other positive outcomes, it has been suggested that the average present-day applicant prefers e-recruitment techniques to traditional recruitment techniques (Naveed, Marinah & Arsalan Mujahid 2014). The overall result on recruitment efforts due to e-recruitment can be significant: faster application processes, increased numbers of qualified candidates, and cost savings for organizations (Elgin & Clapman 2004).

Although positive in many ways, the internet has also increased competition amongst organizations as job postings and recruitment efforts are no longer geographically constrained (Llorens 2011). Beyond the positives, there have been noted negatives associated with e-recruitment. These drawbacks include: too many applicants to screen effectively, extra resources needed to deal with increased numbers of applicants, and protecting the privacy of applicants (Nasreem, Hassan & Khan 2016). As with other HRM policies, e-recruitment cannot guarantee success for any organization, and should be considered independently in every context (Maurer & Liu 2007).

There are steps that public sector organizations can take to ensure that their e-recruitment efforts are successful. At the most basic level, e-recruitment efforts should ensure that (1) *content* and (2) *usability*, are adequate (Seldon & Oresenstein 2011). The content of online recruitment mechanisms should focus on the type of information that is conveyed, the breadth of information, and the presentation of information to applicants (Seldon & Oresenstein 2011). For example, organizations can add a specific amount of sensory imagery, such as videos and photos on recruitment pages; certain types and amounts of imagery on a e-recruitment page can be correlated with applicants' positive feelings towards an organization (Cober et al. 2003). By following these guidelines of content, organizations can help to ensure that their e-recruitment content is easily understood, well-received, and useful to potential applicants. The second important dimension that public sector employers must consider when developing e-recruitment mechanisms is usability. Factors that affect usability include navigability and interactivity (Seldon & Oresenstein 2011). These are important factors to consider, as ease of use, and quality of experience of use can affect an organization's ability to appeal to talent via their e-recruitment mechanisms. It is important to note that usability is correlated with web page usage; if individuals find a site easier to use, and enjoy using one site over another, then the site with simpler, more joyful use will be preferred (Downing & Chang 2014). Therefore, if one site is perceived as more user friendly than another, it will attract more applicants, and thus, will offer a larger candidate pool for selection to the organization. By ensuring that content and usability are targeted towards meeting the needs of potential applicants, public sector organizations can benefit from effective e-recruitment methods. In the modern world, e-recruitment is a process that must be considered by all organizations wishing to maintain their relevance and competitiveness.

## **Meritocracy**

Meritocracy has been deemed crucial to the success of many public sectors. At a basic level, meritocracy refers to fair, non-biased, credible selection of applicants for a job. Meritocratic recruitment means that recruitment is credible and objective, which helps to ensure that the right applicants are attracted to a job based on their qualifications and the needs of a job, or the person-organization fit (Amegashie-Viglo 2014). Alternatives to meritocratic recruitment include nepotism and bribery. In these cases, instead of individuals being selected for their qualifications, other factors are considered. For example, the Georgian civil service often relies on follower loyalties when recruiting and selecting applicants (Abashidze & Selimashvili 2015). In turn, applicants are selected for who they support in an organization, rather than for their skills. The overall result can be a workforce that lacks necessary skills, is unmotivated, and negative public perceptions, and can lead to long-term danger for the public sector's overall success (Abashidze & Selimashvili 2015). A common finding amongst EU member states' public services is that employees are selected in a fair, open, and competitive manner (Ciobanu 2015). By allowing for such fairness in recruiting and selecting new employees, the public service can help to ensure that elites, castes, and other ruling groups do not take hold and control the public sector through unfair recruitment and hiring practices (Lavigna & Hays 2004). Moreover, as seen through the Georgian civil service, unfair recruitment and hiring practices can negatively affect potential applicant's motivation to apply for, or continue to work for an organization (Abashidze & Selimashvili 2015). Research has continually found that meritocracy in recruitment is superior and a key to maintaining the confidence of the public of a nation in the public service (Kernaghan 2011).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This project was exploratory in nature and thus a qualitative methods approach was adopted. It was felt that due to the contextual nature of the application of HRM practices that a survey would not uncover the factors that influenced HRM effectiveness. Further, a case study approach was utilized so that the project could focus on one sample population. The factors that defined the selection of the case were 1) it must be a developing country; 2) ease of access; and 3) evidence of HRM ineffectiveness (e.g. high levels of corruption or nepotism). A Caribbean island state was chosen as a research site due to its status as a developing nation, the government was the largest single employer, the established relationship with several government employees through a researcher's employment with a university within the country, and personal experience and anecdotal evidence of HRM ineffectiveness. The research project was approved by our university research ethics board as well as the country's university research ethics board.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe deeper and pursue arising topics within the interview itself. This meant that after each interview the two researchers conducting the interviews would go over the interview and discuss emerging topics that might necessitate a change in the interview questions. The interview instrument consisted of twelve (12) questions and four (4) demographic questions (age, tenure, education level and place of birth). Participants were recruited via a email sent out to known contacts who were then asked to forward the email on to colleagues who were also asked to forward the email on to colleagues. The email asked participants to directly contact the researchers. Interviews were conducted twelve (12) diverse top ranked executives of the country's ministries. The participants included sitting ministers, under-ministers and department heads. The data was collected in February 2017. Eleven interviews were recorded with one participant requesting that it not be recorded (extensive notes were taken during that interview). All the interviews were done by two researchers and both took notes during the interview noting body language and other indices or signs that were not recorded. Informal conversations that took place after the interviews were also noted if they presented any point of interview. Prior to each interview each participant was reminded of the participant rights as set out in the consent form. The interview started with the demographic questions.

As stated, after each interview the researchers discussed the interview and emerging themes. All interviews and notes were transcribed. All interviews were anonymous, the participants names were replaced with codes and any identifying information was removed from the transcribed. To analyze the data NIVO was used and coding was based on Glaser and Strauss's (1999) interview analysis procedure. Initial codes were based upon the participants words (in-vivo). These codes were then grouped into broad categories. The codes within a given categories were then analyzed to sort out properties that then defined the category. Each of the researchers analyzed the data individually of three interviews and then came together to compare coding results. The final codes were then decided upon with very little adjustments as each researcher came up with very similar coding analysis. The rest of the interviews were coded again by all researchers and once again all the results were discussed by all the researchers and agreement reached on the final outcomes.

## **FINDINGS: KEY ISSUES IMPEDING HR EFFECTIVENESS IN RECRUITMENT**

Our study revealed interested and recurring themes that, when analyzed in light with the literature on the high-performance work practices, show that HR practices are not effective. We found many factors that mostly contradicted what are considered as good human resource practices in recruitment for the public sector.



## Recruitment

Recruitment is an important piece to ensure that an organization has a suitable pool of candidates to select from. Logically, no matter how qualified for a job or how well suited an individual is to an organization, unless one is informed about a job opportunity, there is no chance for that person to join the organization. Thus, as discussed before recruitment is a critical part in the HR process.

Most respondents to our study confirmed that opportunities were communicated through word of mouth and traditional methods such as advertising in the local newspaper. Thus, the advertisement was not as widely distributed as it should or could have been. However, given the fact that this particular country struggles with an unemployment rate of over 30% it makes sense that candidates for most jobs were readily available. Also considering there was a university on the island that offered degrees in the liberal arts and business it also then meant that there was also an abundance of candidates with the educational requirements for more skilled positions (i.e. finance officers, social service, etc.). Therefore, there was no need to cast a wide search for suitable candidates. Additionally, also avoiding a formal selection process involving advertisements, resume sorting and preliminary interviews require less resources to select suitable applicants. Therefore, it understandable why on many of these instances there was no need to cast a wide search for suitable candidates.

It appears that although some job opportunities might be available, it became a matter of who you knew. Therefore, even if a potential job applicant asked about a position, he or she would need to know someone in the organization to get the information, and a potential interview. Several of the respondents mentioned that they did not know whether the position they currently occupy was even open to other candidates or not. For example, to our question pertaining to what the recruitment process was like, one respondent stated:

*Heff 1: There was no recruitment, I took a chance as I was a teacher and government started this job training program that was going to pay me 1/3rd of salary of what I was earning as a teacher and because I loved law, I took a chance with my career and did what I wanted to do. I signed up for job career fair, after two months I was given the contract.*

Along the same line, another interviewee shared that they got the job because he knew someone who connected him to the Permanent Secretary:

*Heff 2: Through applications, I applied to various places, such as teaching. I had been home for a while and this person worked for ministry asked me what you are doing home for a while now, he asked if I had applied for jobs and I stated yes and that I am waiting. So, he stated he will have a word with Permanent Secretary to see how we*

*can help. They called me for interview and eventually I started as temporary clerical officer and then eventually I got appointed.*

These situations limit the pools of candidates who apply for a particular position and therefore the potential of finding the best possible candidate that the organization could get. Such practices create a homogeneous workforce which does not result in high levels of innovation as exemplified by the Malaysian example.

### **Political interference: organizational politics and political party in power interference**

Political interference is another point of the points that has been raised. It comes in many forms: in the selection, hiring, promotion and even in discipline. Participants mentioned that the party that you supported during the election played a role in the recruitment process. Nepotism along party lines in both hiring and promotion was a key factor that was mentioned in the interviews. Transfers or internal recruitment from one ministry to another was also not always motivated by a need, but by other factors such as politics and nepotism.

### **Workplace morale and motivation: pretty low, around 4 out of 10**

One of the findings was that morale and motivation were very low, on average rate around 4 out of 10. This can be seen not only as a consequence, but also as a cause of low performance. Given that most employees stated that the main reason for joining the public sector is the lack of jobs elsewhere, it is understandable that their motivation would be quite low. Indeed, for many of them, choosing public sector was not really a choice, but a default option in that the private sector did not present much opportunities. Again the depth of the labour pool re-enforced the belief in the lack of need for change in recruitment strategies.

### **The old versus the new**

The results of the lack of attention to recruitment strategies was primarily seen in the organizational culture. Participants spoke of a culture of 'do what you have to do' or 'take advantage of the system'. Once employed by the government it was a job for life which promoted ineffectiveness and a lack of accountability. The participants with over ten years of tenure stated that it was the way it was and could see no way to change the system. Yet, new employees (less than three years of tenure) voiced that change had to come about because the old guard were retiring. However, there is a feeling of powerlessness amongst the younger group but with the retirement of the older employees, promotions are occurring within that group. More encouragingly, promotions are now perceived to be more and more based upon merit rather than political nepotism. It seems however employees are recruited, there is a bit higher level of fairness and value for performance in subsequent promotions. Within the political spectrum we can see the change starting to occur. In the last two

elected governments, more than one third of the available seats were filled by female candidates, whereas in previous elections there was only one or two women elected. Moreover, the government has instituted a review of HR policies. Hence, change is in the future but it will have a battle against the ingrained culture of nepotism, political favors and ineffectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

Arguably, one of the most important activities in the HR process is recruitment. Many have heard of the term “GIGO”, most commonly used in manufacturing, which essentially means “garbage-in-garbage-out”. Indeed, who gets attracted to an organization and more importantly who is offered a position determines everything later on. It is the people who determine everything in an organization, so selecting and retaining the right people is of paramount importance. No matter how well designed the policies are, or how well laid out the plan are, or how profitable a particular industry is, nothing gets realized unless the right people are in place, i.e., the HR appropriate for the positions. On the other end, the right people can design the plan, draft and implement policies, and make a sector profitable or enter a profitable one as needed. Thus, organizations must recruit suitable and qualified individuals for vacant positions to realize the true potential of their HR.

The literature shows that two main criteria should be retained when it comes to selecting the right individual for an organization: (1) the *person-job fit*, and (2) *person-organization fit*. In other words, applicants are hired because their skills match the needs of a job and or because they are suitable to the job, the organization and its culture. Ideally, one would want to recruit people who score high on both criteria. However, in situations where job training and professional development are available, one may emphasize the person-organization fit. We argue that this criterion should be given utmost importance in public sector where employees are hired, most of time, for a lifetime career. Given the variety of jobs available and the expectations to constantly adapt to new positions and new job requirements, it is important to recruit those who fit the organization in that they share the mission and values of the organization and they truly desire to serve the public good. This criterion is also important given that public servants should feel called to serve, given that public sector is not as financially rewarding as the private sector.

One of the key fit criteria in terms of person–organization as it pertains to public sector is the attachment to serving the country and the public good. Our study reveals, however, that most employees join the public sector for the wrong reason - as a default option because no other job opportunities were available. The vast majority of employees stated that they are working as public servants as a natural route after school to ensure that they get a regular income. Indeed, for most of them, choosing public sector was not really a choice, but a default option in that the private sector did not present much

opportunities. This is due to an abundant labour pool. This might be a factor in explaining the low level of motivation and moral in the public sector.

The other important criteria, namely the individual – job fit requires a careful job description with the skills and competences required to successfully performance the job. We emphasize that candidates should be assessed against these criteria. This factor is also important in that one would want new employees to be as quickly effective as possible. However, the real issue is not the people who were hired, but the ones that did not apply and, in most cases, left the island. Although some employees stated that they joined the public sector to serve the public good, most interviewees stated that the main reason of them joining public sector is economic in that there were no other viable job opportunities available to them when they graduated. The blame can conveniently be laid at the door of poor economic conditions and the lack of opportunity for growth, but more can be achieved even within the existing socio-economic-political context of the country if recruitment strategies and practices target candidates with a strong desire to make a difference in the country they were born and raised. This could change the very fabric of the public service.

Recruitment strategies lay at the foundation of any successful organization. Get the right people, at the right time for the right job. Governments that are successful reflect recruitment strategies that attract qualified and motivated employees. It is government policies and the implementation of those policies that move from economic failure to economic strength. The examples are across the Asia-Pacific region – China, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore. The commonality amongst that group is a strong, vibrant civil service. It was not a matter of luck that the right people were in the right place but through a recruitment system that brought those people into public service.

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