charts suggest limited concern for the needs of potential applicants and candidates. Only 23 respondents (13 per cent) indicated that information packs were sent to those making enquiries at the recruitment stage and only 13 (7 per cent) that feedback was provided to unsuccessful candidates, which, in some cases, was restricted to internal candidates alone. In only one instance did evaluation of the recruitment and selection process involve obtaining the views of candidates. Discounting the two-way dialogue typifying interviews, selection appeared to be predominantly a one-way process. Clearly, selection methods employed in assessment centres and the use of work sampling (11 per cent) may provide the candidate with insights into the job and its organisational context. However, only 4 per cent of charts indicated the use of any candidate-driven selection methods. In the majority of cases, this involved spending time in the working environment and meeting team members. Taken together, the nature of what should ostensibly be seen as a two-way process (Popovich and Wanous, 1982) appears a long way distant from the development of realistic job previews championed by writers such as Lawler (1994) and candidate-friendly recruitment and selection procedures (Fletcher, 1991; Iles and Robertson, 1997).

Secondary Features: Front-Loaded Investment Model

Findings here can only be deduced from the data provided but the overall lack of strategic or HR planning, general reliance on the classic trio of selection methods, essentially one-way nature of the process and absence of process or outcome evaluation would not suggest that the front-loaded investment model is much in evidence. Consistent with this observation was the evident lack of effort devoted to the analysis of recruitment and selection needs. This was reinforced by the fact that 19 per cent of flow charts did not incorporate a person specification element and that prior planning was seldom in evidence for either recruitment (17 per cent) or selection (14 per cent).

DISCUSSION

Based on the above-findings, if self-reporting of recruitment and selection practice is set against the strategic framework, developed in Figures 6.1 and 6.2, there is very little evidence of the strategic variant in operation. If evidence of strategic fit is both a necessary and sufficient criterion for SR&S then reported findings suggest it was only evident in 2 per cent of the recruitment and selection exercises surveyed. If it is held that the three primary features of strategic fit, strategic recruitment planning and long-term focus must be demonstrated to evidence SR&S then no recruitment and selection exercise (or company) meets all these conditions. If HRP is generously interpreted as a proxy measure of these primary features, because strategic fit and a longer-term focus are implicit, then a further 6 per cent of recruitment and selection exercises could be said to reflect SR&S. Taken together it could then be argued, perhaps very generously, that 8 per cent of recruitment and selection exercises are being strategically driven. If the secondary features are incorporated into the template then, again, no exercise satisfies all identified SR&S criteria, although all four secondary features are far

more evident in those cases incorporating strategic or HR planning than in the population as a whole. Although drawn from a small sample, some evidence of the front-loaded investment model can be found in all those charts incorporating strategic or HR planning into the recruitment and selection process (100 per cent), compared to 57 per cent for the population as a whole. Similarly, for the remaining secondary features of evaluation, sophisticated selection and multi-stakeholder involvement the comparative figures are 36 per cent (9 per cent), 43 per cent (33 per cent) and 43 per cent (23 per cent). On the basis of this evidence, the SR&S glass is virtually empty, albeit with a little froth in the bottom.

In seeking an explanation for the very low incidence of SR&S reported in the flow charts, it is possible to advance a number of arguments. First, it might be argued that whilst not explicit, strategic integration may be implicit in certain facets of recruitment and selection illustrated in the charts, as intimated earlier. However, such a notion is highly questionable as it runs counter to one of the central tenets of strategic integration. Any idea that strategic integration permeates recruitment and selection activity through some kind of osmosis contradicts the idea that strategic fit is central to HRM and has to be actively pursued with the involvement of all employees (Guest, 1987; Mabey and Salaman, 1995).

Second, another potential challenge to the efficacy of reported findings arises over ambiguity in the conceptual framework of SR&S itself. Although a wider and more demanding construction of SR&S consistent with the views of Lundy and Cowling (1996) has been utilised, narrower definitions have their advocates (Borucki and Lafley, 1984). It is possible to delineate at least three levels of interpretation against which flow-chart data can be analysed for evidence of SR&S: the first is where strategic integration alone is accepted as a necessary and sufficient condition to evidence SR&S; the second is where HRP and a long-term focus, although possibly regarded as implicit within strategic planning, are explicitly added to give the three primary features identified earlier; the third is where a set of secondary features can be added to provide the construction of SR&S adopted here. It might be anticipated that the incidence of SR&S will increase the narrower the definition becomes, such that the choice of a more demanding set of criteria here would inevitably depress evidence of its manifestation. However, the data clearly do not support this argument because it can be demonstrated from the findings that irrespective of which interpretation is applied there is minimal evidence of SR&S being practiced.

Third, it might be argued that the practice of SR&S is limited by its selective application by organisations to certain positions only. This would be consistent, for example, with Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm construct, where it is possible to argue that strategic integration may find expression in the recruitment and selection of core but not peripheral workers. However, apart from again running counter to the principles of strategic integration, an analysis of the data by occupation revealed little variation in the recruitment and selection practices applied to the different groupings of senior managers (7 per cent of the total job population), line managers and supervisors (23 per cent), professional and

technical (29 per cent), administration and clerical (38 per cent) and manual employees (3 per cent).

In contrast, it is possible to advance arguments suggesting that evidence of SR&S found in the flow charts is exaggerated. First, the self-reporting method of data collection could conceivably have biased respondents who, when constructing their flow charts, were primed to start at the "very beginning" and work through to the "very end". This emphasis could have led to greater reflection on the two ends of the recruitment and selection spectrum and possibly increased the probability of respondents identifying the elements of strategic planning, HRP and evaluation. It is difficult to imagine this emphasis reduced to likelihood of their identification! This is particularly so bearing in mind that respondents had been sensitised to key elements of the SR&S template before producing their data set. Prior to the production of flow charts respondents had been variously exposed to strategic integration, HRM, HRP and recruitment and selection on their postgraduate study programmes.

Second, it may be recalled that the flow charts produced by respondents were also used as teaching material. Small groups would compare and contrast their flow diagrams and draw conclusions about the messages communicated in terms of actual recruitment and selection practice. In addition, the tutor provided a summary analysis based on a brief review of data supplied by the whole group. This invariably highlighted the lack of strategic integration and HRP, almost non-existent process or outcome evaluation and limited use of sophisticated selection techniques. Close parallels were always drawn to the similarities between the traditional recruitment and selection model and the processes as depicted by respondents' flow charts. As was explained earlier, at this point respondents had the opportunity to comment on the validity of the tutor's analysis. This frequently highlighted omissions in reporting where the most common oversights related to the use of medicals, references and testing but never to strategic planning, HRP or evaluation.

Notwithstanding these arguments, the findings would be far more robust if derived from multiple methods of data collection which, as detailed earlier, has been incorporated into the overall research design. An important dimension of this will be to gain an understanding as to why there appears to be such a mismatch between what is actually happening at ground level and what we might expect if the logic of SR&S advanced earlier is accepted. Now it is only possible to speculate on the reasons for the mismatch, although some likely contenders spring to mind. First, there may be issues around the role of managers, how they are constructed by organisations and perceived by incumbents. Particularly important here may be the low priority afforded to human resourcing that is frequently associated with managerial behaviour (Snape et al., 1993; Beer and Eisenstat, 1996).

Second is the context within which managers operate. SR&S involves a long-term perspective which may not chime with the day-to-day experiences of managers who are under pressure to achieve short-term results. The short-term focus of UK organisations is well documented (Storey and Sisson, 1993) and is

often reinforced by prevailing organisational human resourcing practice. Where managers are appraised and rewarded against short-term performance objectives they are hardly likely to look beyond their immediate and parochial concerns (Storey and Sisson, 1993). It is also possible that a manager's ability to think strategically is constrained by the organisation's failure to communicate effectively its strategic imperatives.

Third, it is possible that management competence rather than organisational context lies at the heart of the problem. At a general level there has long been disquiet about the education and training base of UK managers (Ashton and Felstead, 1995). More specifically, managers have been criticised for their lack of proficiency in the soft-skill areas associated with their human resourcing responsibilities (Garavan, 1991; Beer and Eisenstat, 1996) and it is questionable as to how much training and support managers receive in this area once appointed. With direct reference to their recruitment and selection responsibilities it would be interesting to establish what training they had received for this critical role and explore the extent to which any training equips them to practice the strategic variant. Another dimension of competence is the recruitment and selection of managers themselves. Of particular importance might be the extent to which their recruitment was strategically driven!

Fourth, it is equally legitimate to raise the same question marks over the role and competence of HR practitioners involved in the recruitment and selection process and the context within which they perform their role. For example, applying Storey's (1992) model of HR practice would suggest that a strategic approach is more likely where the role is that of a 'changemaker' compared to say that of a 'handmaiden'. Further, the ability of HR practitioners to influence recruitment and selection practice will be directly affected by their organisational credibility, knowledge and competence. The survey results reported above do not provide grounds for optimism.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the conceptual logic of strategically based recruitment and selection and the clear business case advanced for its practice, the preceding analysis leads to the inescapable conclusion that in reality it is virtually non-existent in the companies surveyed. The evidence presented above firmly supports those who argue that there is a shortage of cases demonstrating strategic selection in action (Lundy and Cowling, 1996) and that recruitment and selection practice is dominated by traditional approaches (Wright and Storey, 1997). Irrespective of how generously the data are interpreted, there is simply no convincing evidence that the strategic variant is being rigorously practised across the 108 organisations or 180 recruitment and selection exercises surveyed. At worst, there was no case that satisfied all of the more exacting criteria demanded by the broader definition of SR&S adopted here. Even when evaluated solely against the 'primary features' associated with narrower definitions of the concept, there was not one case that met all of these conditions. At best, there was some limited evidence that primary and/or secondary features of SR&S were reflected in a fragmentary way by

practice in a few cases. The two examples that came closest to the strategic variant occurred in those cases where, respectively, strategic planning and manpower planning were incorporated into the recruitment and selection process and reflected in the person specification (although, interestingly, not the job description) through organisationally driven competencies that in one case at least were clearly derived from the organisation's corporate strategy.

In terms of the initial question "Is the strategic recruitment and selection glass half full of half empty?", the answer is that it is neither but instead is decidedly empty, although arguably with some traces of froth at the bottom. What little, fragmentary evidence there was of strategic practice was concentrated in line management and supervisory appointments and accounted for the majority of strategic features found. Therefore, even where features of strategic practice are evident it is largely restricted to narrow job clusters which runs counter to the principles of strategic integration on which much of strategic management is based. In terms of Storey's (1992: 35) analysis, it would seem that, on the basis of these findings at least, recruitment and selection is very much a 'Separate, marginal task' rather than an 'Integrated, key task'.

It would appear that, not for the first time, rhetoric appears to be running well ahead of reality. These findings, pointing to a paucity of SR&S practice, may prompt speculation about the real extent of strategic management or HRM in organisations. At this rate a more general search for strategically driven HR management practice may be tantamount to drinking at the proverbial pub with no beer!

Author

Mike Millmore *is currently employed as a Principal Lecturer in the Human Resource Management Research Centre of the University of Gloucestershire's Business School. Main teaching and research interests include HRM as a distinctive approach to managing human resources, recruitment and selection, human resource planning, managing change and performance management.*

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