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Governments around the globe are facing unprecedented staffing challenges. At the time when governments need to be most adept at luring talent to public service, their ability to do so has rarely been so constrained and complicated by economic, social and organizational pressures. This article provides an overview of the types of recruitment and selection initiatives already in place in many nations that can help the world's governments attract and retain talent. Relying heavily upon examples from the United States and Western Europe, but also integrating experiences from a variety of both developed and less developed countries (LDCs), we describe a series of recruitment and selection "best practices."

Ultimately, the ability of government to provide services effectively and efficiently depends upon a competent cadre of civil servants. Good government requires good people. This has always been true, but its importance to the international community has probably never been more critical than it is today. Seldom, if ever, have the world's governments confronted a more daunting set of challenges that affect every nation, regardless of geographic location, political system, social structure or level of development. Powerful forces — globalization, economic competition that cuts across national borders, social and political upheavals, technological change, threats of terrorism, and a rapidly-changing labor market — place enormous burdens on governments. The success of any government to respond effectively to these challenges is dictated largely by its ability to recruit and retain a talented workforce. Nations that fail to compete successfully in the global war for talent are likely to suffer dire consequences, while those that excel will be well positioned to succeed.

Not surprisingly, most of the international community is faced with a common set of human resource management (HRM) dilemmas. In the developed world, common problems are:

- The aging of the indigenous civil service, posing the immediate threat of high turnover and a lack of qualified replacements;

- A growing vacuum among "the leadership bench" — the next generation of policymakers and top civil servants who will assume critical roles in directing their governments' efforts to negotiate the troubled waters of the 21st Century;

- The changing definition of *career*, which means that employee loyalty to the organization is tenuous at best, and which discourages workers from joining government service for the long haul (Green 2002);

- Rapid change (e.g., in technology and economic conditions) that requires a highly fluid *skill mix* in the workforce;

- Strong competition from the private sector for the best and the brightest;

- Budget limitations that reduce compensation and financial incentives, thereby placing government at a disadvantage vis-à-vis business and industry; and

- A negative public image ("government bashing"), which translates into the widespread perception that government is no longer the employer of choice (if it ever was) (Reichenberg 2002).

Compounding these problems are such recent developments as privatization and the outsourcing of many government jobs (a trend that reduces job security and blurs the line between public service and private enterprise), and an erosion of the benefit packages and job security that once were the most effective recruitment tools for government. Adding to this dynamic mix are the widespread demands for "accountability," which often are translated into managerialism — a management focus that harkens back to an earlier era (Classical Management, Scientific Management, or Taylorism) where control functions are heavily emphasized, thereby diminishing some of the intrinsic satisfaction that public service is supposed to provide (Kearney and Hays 1988). Simply stated, today's pressures for greater efficiency in government often make government service less appealing to the very workers whose contributions are needed most.

Of course, less-developed countries face these same challenges, plus even more demanding social, economic and technological barriers.

In sum, it is not hyperbole to suggest that many nations are facing a recruitment crisis. At the time when governments need to be most adept at luring talent to public service, their ability to do so has rarely been so constrained and complicated by economic, social and organizational pressures.

This article provides an overview of the types of recruitment and selection initiatives already in place in many nations that can help the world's governments attract and retain talent. Relying heavily upon examples from the United States and Western Europe, but also integrating experiences from a variety of both developed and less-developed countries (LDCs), we describe a series of recruitment and selection "best practices."

Precursors to Successful Recruitment and Selection

One of the most important truisms in HRM is that the personnel process is a system. Ideally, this means that components should be interrelated and integrated. Thus, it is essential to consider HRM as part of the broader cultural and political environments that influence (or even control) staffing decisions. Any nation's success in recruiting talented and committed people to public service depends not only on many facets of the HRM system, but also on the political, social and economic context.

Without legitimate and transparent political institutions, for example, the public personnel system is likely to be controlled by privileged groups and castes (see, e.g., Anderson 1987). Talent might be "recruited" in this setting, but often through political or familial associations or other contacts. Similarly, countries that are unable to pay their civil servants a competitive wage, or employ outdated HRM policies, clearly have problems attracting applicants in the contemporary labor market. The simple point is that recruitment and selection can't and won't generally be successful unless certain preconditions exist. No matter how innovative and aggressive a public agency might be in attracting applicants — and no matter how many HRM best practices it implements — success will be elusive unless the fundamental conditions are right. With this very pragmatic reality in mind, here are a few of the most critical precursors to recruiting a motivated and competent civil service.

Reversing the Erosion of the Public Service Ethic: One obstacle faced by virtually every nation is that trust and faith in government is at or near an all-time low. Whereas public organizations were once able to recruit civic-minded people merely because they were motivated by a desire to contribute to the greater good in some way, this attitude is now in short supply. This dilemma is usually phrased in terms of the "public image" of government, although what that really reflects is the extent that a public service ethic prevails in a society. Obviously, the dimensions of this problem vary tremendously across the international landscape, but they have surfaced to some extent almost everywhere. The Canadian government, for instance, was so troubled by a perceived decline in the public service ethic that it launched "an unprecedented effort to foster understanding and appreciation for the challenges and achievements of the public service" (Kernaghan 2000).

To explore this dilemma more thoroughly, researchers have examined why job applicants seek work in government (Ito 2002), and how pride in one's job influences worker performance (Bourgault and Gusella 2001). Studies in countries such as Australia (Williams 2001), Belgium (Bouckaert and Victor 2001), and Mexico (Sibeck and Stage 2001) suggest that the dilemma is widespread, and discourages interest in government service.

The "solution" to the erosion of the public service ethic clearly transcends HRM. Without the cooperation of many stakeholders, especially politicians and other officials, the public service's tarnished image will be difficult to repair. Those who campaign against bureaucracy, and/or use facile arguments to blame public agencies for society's ills, are sowing bitter seeds that government must ultimately reap. It is critical this trend be reversed.

Likewise, there is a need for civic education in the public schools. Each generation needs to be taught (and reminded of) the legitimate and critical role that public workers play in their lives, and the obligations and responsibilities that go with the title "civil servant."

Despite the Herculean challenge of reinvigorating the public service ethic, the research to date does provide a few signposts for improvement. Some factors that typically discourage interest in public jobs include slow and bureaucratic recruitment processes, narrow job descriptions, the perception that seniority prevails over merit, and excessive rules and regulations (Langan 2002). As discussed below, the growing trend to inject flexibility into HRM procedures offers hope.

HRM as Partner to Line Management: The second critical precursor to an effective recruitment and selection program is the extent that HR is a service function. As almost everyone acknowledges, personnel has long been perceived (and even defined) in terms of control, rather than service to the broader organization. HR is often viewed as the problem, not the solution — an obstacle to be circumvented, not an ally of line managers. This perception has been repeatedly reported in dozens of national settings, including Italy (Reina 2001), the entire English-speaking world (Hood 2000), and many LDCs such as Thailand (Simananta and Aramkul 2002), and Trinidad-Tobago (Marchack 2002).

Perhaps the most promising development to reverse this situation has been the extent that outdated notions of HR's role are being shed. With the advent of "new public management" (often called reinvention and/or "New Public Administration" in the United States), many nations have transformed their personnel functions. Key changes have occurred as HR functions have been decentralized to operating units, line managers have been empowered to make many HR decisions that once were reserved to a central authority, and widespread initiatives have been undertaken to "de-bureaucratize" HRM by eliminating unnecessary rules and regulations.

In the best cases, flexibility has replaced procedural inertia, and responsiveness has supplanted control as HR's primary objective. While this trend is by no means universal, it is strongly evident in Europe, North America and a growing number of LDCs. Where this new model of HR service delivery is implemented, recruitment and selection can be improved.

Civic Culture and Tradition: Anyone writing from a Western perspective can easily fall into the trap of ascribing Max Weber's notions of public management to the entire world. In the West, we often talk in terms of "modern bureaucracy," emphasizing such qualities as advanced and stable political institutions, bureaucratic neutrality and accountability, some degree of separation between politics and administration (in theory, at least), public sector careers, specialization and objectivity in job assignments, and "merit" (however defined). Our preoccupation with Western models also leads us to assume that secularism, rationality, competition, an achievement orientation, and individualism also predominate elsewhere. Nothing could be further from the truth. These concepts largely stem from Western culture, and many simply do not apply outside that context.

Space limitations preclude a thorough discussion of this pitfall, but a few sentences are necessary to explain why Western solutions cannot be prescribed for every cultural setting. In brief, most LDCs developed from a colonial tradition in which their administrative institutions were imposed by Western powers. Although colonial rule installed powerful administrative systems in the Third World, "… it failed to export democratic political institutions" (Haque 1996, 319). The all-too-common result is that the bureaucracy left behind has emerged as the dominant force in many LDCs, even though democracy has not taken hold. Throughout much of Asia and Africa, for example, government power is most evident in bureaucracy, not in the relatively weak and unstable political institutions. "Unlike western nations, where the power of modern bureaucracy is counterbalanced by advanced political institutions, in most Third World countries the expansive power of the civilian and military bureaucracies is often unbalanced in relation to their weak political institutions" (Haque 1996, 320). Indeed, bureaucracy (often as a complement to military dictatorships) substitutes for popular government in West Africa, much of Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia (Dwivedi and Nef 1982).

In the absence of a tradition of liberal democracy, Western managerial ideals are woefully out of place in these nations. Third World countries often exhibit a completely different set of cultural values, including ritualism, a caste structure, the extended family, seniority-based authority, and collective responsibility. It is therefore no surprise that neutral, merit-based forms of recruitment and selection have been slow to take hold in LDCs. Frequently, traditional criteria such as family, ethnicity or caste trump qualities like merit, ability and achievement (Haque 1996, 322). Nepotism and friendship also influence most HRM decisions, thus preventing concepts like merit systems and recruitment based on credentials and competition from taking hold (Hopkins 1991).

However, this discussion is not meant to suggest that modern HRM strategies are unworkable in most LDCs. Indeed, a large number of these countries operate some type of "merit system" because they are required as a condition of international aid and assistance programs (e.g., the International Monetary Fund requires this). The point, however, is that these approaches to HRM are often incompatible with the indigenous value structures and customs that prevail in LDCs. This simple fact helps explain why the notion of "reform" often gets sidetracked in Third World countries, and why bold prescriptions about modernizing administrative tasks occasionally fall on deaf ears outside of the industrialized nations.

There is one more political-cultural consideration that may be a barrier to HRM innovation, even in highly developed countries. In some parliamentary systems, power is divided among many political parties. In this pluralistic situation, HRM systems occasionally parcel government jobs based on party representation. Israel's "hyper-fragmentation" of political authority is said to minimize objective criteria in selection (Amado 2001). In effect, this is just another example of how a nation's cultural setting inevitably influences HRM practices. To expect otherwise would be naïve, but reformers often seem to overlook the obvious in their fervor to spread managerial innovations.

Managerial Systems: In addition to the systemic issues discussed above, sound recruitment and selection practices also depend on complementary HRM systems. For example, an adequate employee records system is needed to track applicant status and progress. More importantly, a human resource planning system should guide and drive the recruiting system. In the absence of solid HR planning, openings occur as "surprises" rather than as predicted events for which the organization is prepared. Other important HRM components are a competitive compensation system, a reliable (and not too restrictive) set of job descriptions, a workable classification scheme (broadly defined pay bands are currently the rage), employee development opportunities to promote worker growth and stem attrition, succession planning, and a reasonable amount of job security. Without any one of these complementary features, even the most carefully-crafted recruitment program may fail to attract and retain talent.

Emerging Approaches to Recruitment and Selection

The news is not all bad, however, despite the many conditions necessary for a modern and effective recruitment and selection program. Clearly, the challenge is to fashion a workable recruitment strategy even though some pieces of the puzzle are probably missing. Fortunately, it *is* possible to attract and select new talent into most public organizations. Governments searching for particularly hard-to-find skills (e.g., nurses and information technologists are especially problematic in the United States) may encounter severe difficulties, while many other posts can be easily filled with the applicant pool readily at hand.

Simply filling positions is one issue, but to optimize recruitment results — to attract "the best and the brightest" — requires a more coordinated and proactive approach. Since no one organization has developed a "perfect" staffing program, there is no specific model that can meet all needs. Instead, every public agency can benefit from incremental changes in how it identifies, recruits, screens and hires civil servants. Public organizations can choose from among a rich list of recruitment techniques that might strengthen their competitiveness in the labor market. Governments have a wide array of options ranging from the basic to highly sophisticated. These techniques are described below under three broad (and overlapping) categories: procedural changes, process innovations and technological applications.

Procedural Changes: These are changes that can be implemented more easily than process changes (see the next section). Both simple and more complex procedural adjustments can improve and expedite recruitment of public servants. Most procedural "innovations" are intended to simplify and demystify the application process to prospective workers. In other words, governments are attempting to make their entry procedures more user-friendly and transparent. Other procedural changes are designed to enhance government's attractiveness to applicants and its allure to current employees. Employee retention is, in fact, a recruitment strategy because higher retention rates translate into lower recruitment needs. Examples of both of these types of changes are:

- Eliminating arbitrary rules and regulations that restrict the choices of hiring managers and supervisors. One primary example from the United States is the recent elimination of arbitrary limits on the number of candidates from which hiring managers can select (e.g., rule of three, rule of five, etc.). Previously, in the federal government and some states and local governments, only the top three or five finishers on an entrance exam could be considered for appointment. This archaic rule has either been abolished altogether in many locations, or supplanted with a more generous "rule of 20" or some other alternative. A similar technique is to introduce flexibility in posting requirements that previously delayed appointments. For instance, if a job must be publicly posted for 30 days or more, many qualified applicants unable or unwilling to wait will seek employment elsewhere. Research in Canada has shown that the "timeliness of appointment" is a major consideration for new workers (Ito 2002), so any measure that speeds the process will probably be worthwhile. Another restrictive practice is a residency requirement that obligates workers to live in the jurisdiction where they are employed. In fact, some public agencies in the United States are discouraged (and in some cases forbidden) from even recruiting candidates from outside the jurisdiction. Obviously, the elimination of such restrictions is a simple way to expand applicant pools.

- Adopting flexible and appealing hiring procedures. Government has not always extended a welcoming and helpful hand to job applicants. Instead, applying for a public position can be equated with a visit to the dentist (except the pain can persist longer). In addition to encountering many procedural barriers, candidates were (and still are, in some cases) once required to follow strict guidelines on when and where tests could be taken, how often interviews were conducted, and other irrational regulations (e.g., omitting one seemingly irrelevant item on an application form disqualifies the candidate). Progressive governments have eliminated these artificial barriers by making the application process more inviting (i.e., training interviewers to not only evaluate candidates but also to market jobs); providing more hospitable physical settings; and offering flexibility in the dates, times and locations of tests and interviews.

- Screening applicants quickly. Too often, government has a well-earned reputation for asking applicants to endure long and tortuous examination procedures. To change this perception (and reality), some jurisdictions now require applicants merely to submit a résumé. Qualified candidates are then promptly interviewed by telephone (Lavigna 2002). A variation on this theme is where agencies ask applicants to complete self-assessments for certain positions (e.g., information management jobs). An even more streamlined approach is to automatically certify applicants as eligible for appointment if they meet certain conditions such as holding a professional license or credential (Lavigna 2002). Some employers even permit immediate hiring of applicants whose college grades are sufficiently high (Hays and Sola 2004).

- Validating entry requirements and examinations. One of the thorniest problems in HRM is validating testing instruments and other pre-entry requirements. Often, once exposed to empirical scrutiny, screening devices are found to be faulty predictors of job performance. For this reason, it is essential that any test protocol be validated for job-relevancy and discriminatory impact. The pressure to devise valid exams has led to the growing adoption of performance-based tests (e.g., a building supervisor applicant might be required to read a set of blueprints and list the order in which subcontractors would need to work on a construction site). Other strategies highly regarded in the HRM literature and by practitioners are assessment centers for higher-level workers; the use of biodata (a proven technique that examines past behavior as a predictor of future performance); and unassembled exams (the objective review of an application or résumé, followed by an interview) (Hays and Sowa 2004).

  Unassembled exams have lower validity than other approaches such as written exams. Therefore, the job interview process becomes dramatically more important. For this reason, much attention has focused on improving interview reliability by training interviewers, using group interviews (i.e., several members of the applicant's prospective work group participate in the interview), and expanding the use of structured interviews. A minimal requirement is that interviewers use a patterned interview format that ensures that every applicant is asked an identical set of questions, and that their responses are systematically recorded and evaluated. Another trend is to de-emphasize experience and/or education as job requirements. Many candidates are simply over-qualified educationally, thereby contributing to credentialism. This is the trend to require additional qualifications — higher academic degrees and more certifications — even if they are not required by the job. This can artificially limit the applicant pool and can hinder efforts to diversify workforces. Moreover, using years of experience as a minimum requirement is increasingly viewed as a very poor way to screen applicants, and one that unnecessarily excludes candidates who might be excellent performers (Sullivan 2002).

- Instituting worker-friendly personnel policies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has identified several logical means to make public organizations more desirable employers. Germany has been repeatedly cited as a hotbed of worker-friendly personnel policies. These include the wide use of flexible work hours (also a common feature in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and elsewhere); flat hierarchies that offer workers more opportunities to participate in decision-making; telecommuting; family-friendly procedures (e.g., time off for either husband or wife to care for children or other relatives); and good working conditions (Reichenberg 2002). Comparable approaches are being put into place in relatively unpleasant work settings in the United States, such as for child abuse investigators. These workers, who deal with difficult situations and often find little intrinsic joy in their labors,

are "rewarded" by supportive leadership; cooperative management styles; and non-monetary incentives such as recognition, small awards and plaques, open communications, and group activities (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2002).

- Creating more flexible job descriptions. Research both in the United States and elsewhere has repeatedly demonstrated that narrow job descriptions and restrictive career ladders discourage potential employees. The promise of job rotation or other tactics to enhance professional development, coupled with a clear and progressive career ladder, greatly boosts government's competitiveness in the labor marketplace. Likewise, the opportunity to compete for salary increases (i.e., pay for performance) is likely to appeal to today's applicant far more than the seniority system that still dominates compensation and advancement in some public personnel systems. Similarly, workers derive greater intrinsic satisfaction when they have autonomy to complete work assignments; face a challenging yet manageable workload; are required to follow only minimal "standard operating procedures" (SOPs); and rarely have to endure long, boring staff meetings. One needs only to read the Dilbert cartoons popular in the United States to understand how and why such measures can aid both employee recruitment and retention.

Improvements to the Recruitment and Selection Process: Process changes are fundamental improvements in the way HRM services are delivered. As noted above, public sector recruitment has a notorious reputation for being slow, unresponsive, bureaucratic and passive. Too often, public agencies have assumed that qualified applicants would clamor for job openings. These agencies therefore are seldom engaged in aggressive outreach programs or other ways to attract superior job candidates. In many cases, this reactive approach results from the centralized and control-oriented way that HR services are delivered. This often means that applicants enter government through a single point of entry where a jurisdiction's entire recruitment function is handled by one agency. Often, HRM in this setting enforces many rigid rules that discourage and dishearten potential employees. Insights into some of these rules and regulations were provided in the preceding section on procedural change, since one of the most positive developments in contemporary HRM is reducing the reliance on control activities.

Accordingly, improved recruitment and selection processes is the second major reform theme. The most significant component of this trend is the decentralization of HR services to operating units. Additionally, many less dramatic changes have surfaced in the ways that public organizations marshal their human resources and entice new recruits to the halls of government.

- The decentralization movement — "New Public Management" is known in many quarters as devolution, often characterized by the decentralization of HR responsibility. Giving operating agencies and managers the flexibility to handle most HR decisionmaking accelerates the speed, flexibility and responsiveness of recruit-

ment. Among the many features of this movement are multiple points of entry (applicants are screened by agencies or other sub-units, rather than being required to wander through a maze of centrally-prescribed regulations); and delegated testing authority (which allows subunits to conduct their own examinations). Moreover, operating and managers have more control over job descriptions; public announcement of openings; recruiting; and terms of appointment (e.g., the salary level and/or rank that can be offered without central approval).

- Decentralization internationally — The international scorecard on HR decentralization is somewhat surprising. For a profession that has a reputation for resisting change, it is very revealing to catalogue the transformations taking place as HR functions are delegated in more and more locations. In some countries, such as New Zealand, the decentralization of public sector HR is almost absolute, and also (predictably) includes the virtual elimination of employee protections. Less zealous (but still noteworthy) cases of decentralization have occurred in the United Kingdom, Australia, Switzerland and Sweden (Shim 2001, 324). The OECD rates several countries — the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada and the United States — as having adopted a "moderate" amount of decentralization. According to the OECD, only a few national governments (e.g., France and Japan) have opted to retain centralized and highly protective systems of public HRM (Shim 2001; OECD 2000).

  Where decentralization is being pursued with less enthusiasm, several nations are trying to nevertheless make their recruitment processes more effective and modern. This is especially prevalent in Southern Europe; Korea; Poland (Shim 2000, 342); Hungary (Jenei and Zupko 2001); Albania (The COMPASS Project 2001); and in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda and Nigeria (Sezi 1997). Interesting developments include the dissolution of civil service in Sweden. In this country, public workers do not enjoy tenure, and outside candidates are encouraged to apply for all vacancies. In the Netherlands, a Senior Public Service has been created to reduce attrition among senior-level workers whose job security has eroded. Pay-for-performance systems in Austria, Germany, Norway, Poland, Portugal and other countries are designed to make public agencies more competitive with their private sector counterparts.

- Aggressive outreach efforts — Decentralization alone won't attract qualified applicants. Increasingly, public agencies are using strategies that have long been exploited by business and industry. Obvious examples include the growing use of government recruiters (who pursue aggressive outreach strategies at job fairs, on college campuses, in local communities, etc.); aggressive advertising in print and electronic media; distribution of marketing and recruitment material (e.g., brochures) that promote public service careers; use of toll-free automated telephone systems to publicize job openings; and much more aggressive efforts to stay in touch with job applicants during the screening process. This last

approach — often part of an *applicant tracking system* — ensures that no one "falls through the cracks" and/or misinterprets a lack of communication as a sign that the employer is no longer interested. Simply stated, public agencies are casting a wider net for job applicants, and then cultivating them as they move through the selection process. This strategy is strengthened by hiring full-time recruiters, directly communicating with multiple organizations that are potential sources of job candidates, systematically distributing job postings to academic institutions, and using outside search agencies ("headhunters") to recruit high-profile applicants for important vacancies (Lavigna 2002).

- Current employees as recruiters — Due to concerns about propriety and the supposed neutrality of the civil service, public agencies have only recently involved their own employees in the search for new talent. The tactic proven to be most effective is employee referrals, in which current workers are asked to recommend qualified candidates. Ironically, this is the favored recruitment strategy in many sectors of private industry, but is only now surfacing in government. In some cases, referral bonuses (or "bounties") are paid to employees who help recruit successful candidates in high-need skill areas (e.g., engineers or information management workers). In general, these systems pay a modest amount when the referred applicant is hired, and then a more significant amount (perhaps US $1,000) when that person finishes a probationary period. A related strategy is retention bonuses that are paid to current workers who promise to stay in the organization for a designated period of time. For example, nurses — who are very marketable in the United States — might receive a US $10,000 bonus for signing a three-year extension with a public hospital.

  As emphasized above, retention helps recruitment by reducing the number of vacancies to fill, and also signaling that the organization is a good place to work. This principle has guided additional innovations that are now widely embraced by forward-thinking public agencies in many countries. For example, using temporary workers not only saves money but also gives the hiring organization an opportunity to assess a worker's talents before he/she is hired into a permanent position. Internships are another variation on this theme. In one United States social service agency, paid interns are placed in the most challenging jobs (welfare eligibility worker, or child abuse caseworker) for two to three years. Because most attrition from these unpleasant occupational settings occurs early (the belief is that if a worker stays three years, he or she will make a career of the job), internships represent not only job "try-outs," but lengthy probationary periods in which only the most committed workers emerge. A final strategy is to aggressively use mentors to ease the entry of new workers, help socialize them to the organization's norms and expectations, and provide guidance and support. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that mentoring cuts down on attrition and improves the morale of newly-hired workers (Hays and Sowa 2004). Thus, a large number of relatively low-cost techniques can not only improve recruitment efforts, but also trim attrition and enhance job satisfaction.

Use of Technology: Virtually all recruitment strategies can be enriched by different types of information technology (IT). In fact, many scholars believe that technology will be the most notable HRM trend of the next few decades (Hendrickson 2003). There is essentially a movement from traditional HRM to virtual HRM, characterized by developing a paperless environment that relies on electronic interactions, using intranets, the World Wide Web, and software packages that improve HR processes (Elliot and Tevavichulada 1999).

The continuing effort to make hiring faster and more user-friendly has fueled the widespread application of computer technology. Many large public organizations use computer bulletin boards and electronic mail to publicize job vacancies. This system of on-line job posting is very helpful to internal candidates, but is also becoming increasingly accessible to outside candidates as large percentages of the world's population go online (the number of Web users has surpassed 200 million and is growing rapidly). From the applicant's perspective, technology provides more timely information on vacancies and the hiring organization itself, as well as the opportunity to apply online (from anywhere at any time) and even test online in some cases.

For managers, IT helps them identify and track qualified candidates for different positions. Through automation, managers can have online access to applicants' test scores, qualifications and contact information. This provides a faster and more efficient way to screen and contact prospective employees. Some governments are striving to create paperless application systems in which all applications and updates are online, thereby eliminating the need for applicants to schedule appointments, incur travel expenses, and/or deal with the other frustrations of the staffing process. A variation on this theme — the résumé database — is also creating a stir in public sector recruiting. It involves creating national and international databases of professional credentials that can be used to pre-screen thousands of applications simultaneously. These systems have enjoyed explosive growth in the private sector, and are projected to become the primary method of recruiting in the industrialized world (Marchak 2002).

These specific IT applications to HRM systems abound across the globe. For example, computers are used to track applicants and administer examinations in Thailand (Simananta and Aramkul 2002), as well as in much of Western Europe (Reinermann 1997). Computer-assisted testing (CAT) is widely used in the United States, and is making inroads in other countries, such as Great Britain and Canada (Hamman and Desai 1995). In one advanced CAT system, the applicant first answers questions of moderate difficulty. If those items are answered correctly, the computer presents more difficult ones; if the initial questions are "missed," easier ones are provided. The point where the applicant "proceeds from knowing generally less difficult items to not knowing more difficult ones is that individual's score" (Hamman and Desai 1995, 100). Not only do CATs enhance test validity, but they also allow organizations to process large numbers of applicants quickly and painlessly. When linked with other databases (such as online application forms or résumés), CAT provides managers with an almost instant capability to access eligibility lists and other applicant tracking data.

Similar applications exist in state and local agencies in the United States. Automated systems are used to match résumés with skill sets for particular jobs (Selden and Jacobson 2003). Technology is also being used to enhance employee development programs, as shown in an online evaluation system in the state of Michigan that creates a computer-assisted dialogue between supervisors and subordinates about training needs and promotional potential (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2002). Given market forces and the inexorable march of technology, these trends can only accelerate and expand internationally. Hastening this process will be the increasing numbers and types of software packages. Software programs are already available to administer online examinations, track applicants, match résumés with skill sets, expedite background checks, and shepherd job candidates through a paperless staffing process. Even if the entire world is not ready for a fully automated approach to HR, the technology is already available.

The Future?

This article presents a broad overview of some recruitment and selection strategies emerging across the world. Exciting changes are taking place, and traditional ways to deliver personnel services are clearly on the decline. Organizations that do not take advantage of new approaches and techniques will fall increasingly behind business and industry, where market forces virtually require that employers keep pace with the march of "progress."

Despite the real and potential advantages of new strategies and technologies, a few words of caution are necessary. First, the watchword of the new HR era is flexibility, but this can be costly, literally and figuratively (Farnham 1997). Notably, public personnel systems that are decentralized and deregulated can fall victim to manipulation and exploitation. The headlong rush toward HRM systems that mimic the private sector model is also risky if we ignore the potential downside of this trend. Government and the private sector are not the same, and rushing to adopt private sector approaches without recognizing fundamental differences is a high-risk strategy.

As governments strive for increased responsiveness and flexibility, safeguarding the public service from inappropriate influences may become more difficult. At a minimum, professional public administrators need to be alert to the risks associated with reform. Although there is a critical need to ensure that governments can attract and retain talent, maintaining the neutrality of the public service should be a non-negotiable value.

Another potential threat is posed by the enormous impact of IT on HRM. Although technology offers a wonderful opportunity to improve and expedite HR operations, it also reduces the "human factor" (West and Berman 2001). Technology adds efficiency, but also depersonalizes functions that were built on human interaction and individual judgment. Whether or not this is good or bad is debatable. We pose this question merely as another consideration to factor into the international discussion of HR's transition from a traditional to a virtual tool of line managers.

Ultimately, public organizations must adopt at least some of the recruitment and selection strategies described simply because to do otherwise would be self-defeating. The crises that plague public services in almost all nations are too daunting to permit complacency. The primary challenge for HR professionals is to select the reforms most suitable to their own settings, and to adapt them to local needs. There is no shortage of good ideas, and we hope there will be no shortage of will and creativity in the further implementation of HRM reform. The stakes are far too high for government not to change.

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