

Recruitment on the field : an insight

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SWABHIMAAN : the recruiting organisation

Swabhimaan was created in 2000 with the impulse of François-Xavier HAY – Project Officer in Pune for Inter Aide – in order to provide several Indian NGOs with technical and organisational support. These operational NGOs are involved in productive loan, professional training and health mutual funds, both in Pune and in Mumbai. Swabhimaan assists those NGOs in the following areas : IT, accounting, administration and management, fund raising, etc.

The members of staff are : Kishor, Swabhimaan Director ; Rameeja and Mangesh, audit managers ; Shobhana, human resources officer ; Pankaj, IT manager ; Rupsha, fund raising officer ; Dr Arti, medical coordinator and Suresh, health and marketing consultant. The support committee is composed of the different directors for the NGOs as well as FX Hay.

Among the 7 salaried employees of Swabhimaan, 5 were recruited in 2004, which implies a very dynamic recruitment activity.

Shobhana has been in charge of human resources management both for Swabhimaan and the partner NGOs for one and a half year now. Aged 29, she is a MBA graduate in Human Resources and first started as an HR officer in a Mumbai ashram. Recruitment takes up to 20% of her work load in Swabhimaan.

The recruitment context

Swabhimaan is searching for a new accountant, the former accountant was fired a few weeks before. It is a full-time job.

The job description

Shobhana has at her disposal a mission description in order to prepare the job add. Swabhimaan's main objectives in terms of financial management are listed together with the corresponding evaluation criterias. The recruitment requirements have not been listed (education level, work experience, specific skills etc.).

The importance of the job description

It is essential to take the time to elaborate a comprehensive job description prior to any recruitment mission. This job description should cover at least the following points : mission and activities, position in the organisation chart. The job description must be defined according to the organisation's main global objective, which must be clearly stated also. The job description can be elaborated with the contribution of the current person in charge and must be validated by the supervising manager. It is not only a recruitment tool, it is also a very useful management tool. Therefore it should be updated regularly, i.e. on an annual basis.

The recruitment criterias/requirements will be defined on the basis of the job description, as well as the resulting job add.

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The job add

The add content

The add for the accounting position has been elaborated in order to attract potential candidates for a second position (more experimented profile).

Swabhimaan is merely presented as a “social organisation”.

The add mentions the job title, the level of education as well as the level of experience and technical skills required.

The candidates are asked to go in directly for interview on a specific day with their resume ready : it is a “walk-in interview”, very common in India.

Publishing the add

Shobhana has chosen three main channels :

The press : the add was published in several Indian daily newspapers, both national and local. It is rather costly, therefore the add must be shortened to the minimum amount of words. Several publications were necessary to attract interesting candidates.

Handing out adds in the street

By word of mouth

One has to be careful about handing out job adds in the street : in France for instance it is forbidden.

There often is a national employment agency which can publish the add for free.

It is a good idea to let know similar organisations or NGOs working in the same area/field that you are looking for someone.

Last but not least, the Internet. It has now become the most efficient way to attract candidates. Swabhimaan lately recruited Rupsha's and Shobhana's replacements by posting adds on the web. However, most of the countries where Inter Aide works do not have a very developed Internet system and most people do not have access to it anyway.

It is essential to chose the diffusion channel according to the type of position and the required profile. For instance, a field worker cannot be recruited on the web.

Eventually, one should bear in mind that diffusing a job add is an indirect means to communicate about the organisation and its activities.

The recruitment process

The screening of the candidates

Walk-in interviews

Applicants turn up during the two days defined on the job-add. Shobhana sees them by order of appearance (which sometimes generate difficulties due to simultaneous arrivals...) for a 20-minute interview. Shobhana has a very good command of the interviewing technique. She is an “active listener” and displays a neutral and open attitude which allows her to get as much information as possible from the candidate. She has previously set up a list of questions ranging from the most technical aspects such as the knowledge of a specific software to more personal elements, and she often shifts from one to the other. She then informs the candidates about the following steps and offers to get back to them after a few days.



A practice best-suited to the field

Walk-in interviews, apart from being a cultural practice in India, are also well suited to most field-work contexts. It is indeed difficult to set up a process which would imply mailing or e-mailing resumes, since these services are sometimes difficult to rely on, or simply inaccessible. This limit is probably the same in other developing countries, therefore the walk-in interview appears to be a viable option.

During my field experience with Swabhimann, I attended only individual meetings, however, Shobhana also uses group-interviews, during which the candidates discuss a theme that she has chosen in advance. The group-interview is also a selection tool, and it leads to the same step, i.e. the interview with the committee members.

One or several interviews ? One-to-one interview or group interview ?

In Swabhimaan, the full recruitment process consists of two interviews : a one-to-one or a group-interview with the HR officer, followed by an individual interview with several interviewers.

Even if different interviewing techniques can be used during a recruitment process, it is rather unsafe to state about an application without seeing the candidate at least once on an individual basis.

An individual interview and a group interview do not give the same sort of information about someone : using indifferently both types of interviews, as Shobhana does, is in fact a fake gain of time. The group-interview should be a “plus”, allowing us to observe a candidate – previously selected – in a group situation. It is not a compulsory step.

The most common option in terms of recruitment procedure remains the series of individual interviews with one interviewer (the “one-to-one” interview).

The candidates evaluation

Shobhana has prepared an evaluation framework in order to compare the candidates according to the full list of recruitment criterias. She will short-list 5 candidates whom she will present to François-Xavier.

Shobhana has also prepared a technical test on an accounting software, with which the applicants begin the selection procedure.

About tests

Tests are not absolutely necessary in a recruitment process. The only valuable test is the technical test. Other tests, such as personality tests, are very much open to criticism and must in any case be analysed by psychologists.

On the other hand, there is no reason not to use a technical test if it is easy to use and to evaluate. However, the recruitment process should not begin with the test : there are better ways to establish the contact with the candidate !

The final interview with the members of the support committee

The short-listed candidates then meet the members of the committee for an individual interview. There are then several interviewers.



Who should conduct the interview ?

It is rather uncommon to have a full-time HR officer in the team. Conducting a job-interview is a delicate exercise and the interviewer should be trained beforehand.

A special attention should be given to the choice of the person who is going to operate the first selection : this person is indeed going to represent the organisation or the project in front of the candidates. It is therefore essential that this person carries an adequate image and is able to answer questions. Then, it also seems reasonable that the person in charge of the pre-selection should not be a direct collaborator of the potential collaborator. Assigning the recruitment to a collaborator or to a supervisor can engender many prejudices...

A technical interview is always a good thing : it can be conducted by a future colleague.

The final interview can be conducted by the supervisor, together with another person or not.

Last but not least, one should bear in mind that the choice of the interviewers is an indirect way to communicate about the organisation but also about the hierarchical structure of the organisation...

The number of interviewers

The multi-interviewers technique is rather difficult to manage: it is essential that the interviewers know each other well enough and that they agree about the questions and the development of the interview. Speaking times must be established for every interviewer. One can also conduct the interview and let the other(s) ask questions at the end. Or each interviewer can chose to focus on a different area.

However, the number of interviewers should not outpass 2 people. With more than two interviewers, the candidate can feel like he is facing a court and this will induce specific answers and attitudes that might not be most revealing. On the interviewers' side, being more than two increases the risks of misunderstanding, misinterpretations and so on. It is then better to organise a series of individual interviews in order to confront the different points of view.

Cooptation

Cooptation has a lot of immediate advantages. It is however important to secure a proper recruitment procedure: are the profile requirements met? What are this person's motivations? Who are the people who co-opt her? Do they have an inside knowledge of the organisation? In fact, what seems at first to be a gain of time can sometimes turn out to be a total failure if the person has to be replaced...

Integration

Shobhana was in the process of setting up an integration programme for new collaborators, planning an individual meeting with each member of staff and several visits on the field. The integration period is of prime importance but it is nevertheless very often neglected. Hence Shobhana's initiative was a particularly judicious one... even though it might not be necessary to formally write down in detail the steps and activities wich form the integration.

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