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**CHOOSING THE BEST PERSON FOR A JOB:  
A Critical Account of Three Methods of Recruitment**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper examines critically three methods of recruitment employed to select persons for a job. They are recruitment to the SLAS The paper examines critically three methods of recruitment employed to select through an open competitive examination, selection of persons by the Constitutional Council (established under the 17th Amendment to the Constitution) to serve on independent commissions, and the selection of cricketers to serve on the national cricket team. Each of these methods suits the specific purpose for which it is used and cannot be interchanged. The paper concludes that each method has its flaws and there is no fool – proof method though the method employed in the field of cricket is the best.

**Key words:** Recruitment, Three types of Recruitment : Exam oriented recruitment, work experience oriented recruitment, performance oriented recruitment, No single procedure suits all situation.

Selecting the best person for a given office is one of the most complicated themes in organization theory. Those who are chosen for political office subscribe to the elective principle; that is, the membership is given the power to vote for persons whom it thinks are most suitable to hold office. This principle is also followed in most sports bodies, academic, scientific and professional associations. That this method is not fool-proof is borne out by the various scandals that emerge from time to time involving political office-holders, and others running the affairs of associations and trade unions.

HRM theory prescribes a different principle. The Job is analyzed for what is expected of it leading to a job description. The attributes necessary for the proper discharge of the responsibilities of the job are then identified which then leads to the qualifications and qualities that prospective aspirants should have. These qualifications and qualities are then assessed, often, at a face to face interview with the applicants, and

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the most suitable candidate (in the opinion of that particular interview panel) chosen for the job. Despite its technical sophistication this method is also not without its drawbacks. Academic or professional qualifications alone do not guarantee good performance in the job. Personal integrity and honesty do not lend themselves for easy assessment at an interview. Generally, interviews favour those who are articulate ; unfortunately, also the trademark of confidence tricksters.

Against this background of ambivalence and doubt, this essay will attempt to examine three different methods of recruitment that have been practised or are currently practised. They are recruitment to the SLAS, selection of persons by the Constitutional Council (17 th Amendment to the Constitution) for nomination to the independent commissions, and the selection of cricketers for the national team.

### **Recruitment to the SLAS**

The recruitment procedure through an open competitive examination is basically what was prescribed in the SLAS Minute published in the government gazette of 14 November 2005 and made effective retrospectively from 01 January 2005 (PSC, 2005).

To be eligible to apply for the open competitive examination a person has to be citizen, a graduate of a recognized university, not attained the age of 28 years on the closing date for applications, and be of “excellent moral character and sound constitution.” Obviously, the intention of the age limit is to catch young persons who pass out of the university system. However, the evaluation of “excellent moral character” of prospective candidates will remain problematic. The absence of known malfeasance need not necessarily imply a good moral character.

The examination proper consists of a written component and an interview with a structured marking scheme approved by the PSC (Ibid, Appendix A) . The written part consists of four papers carrying 100 marks each: General Intelligence, Essay and Precis, General Knowledge and Aptitude for Management. The interview also carries 100 marks. At the early stages of the SLAS, candidates were awarded a substantial amount of marks (about 50%) for sitting papers in subjects they had gained proficiency in their university career, e.g. Pali, Sanskrit, Physics, Chemistry, etc. This practice has been done away with.

The Essay and Precis paper tests a candidate’s ability to present ideas

in an ordered manner and his powers of comprehension. The General Knowledge paper is a test of a candidate's awareness of social, political, economic and cultural affairs. There is some overlap in the two papers of General Intelligence and Aptitude for Management; the former tending to test literacy and the latter tending more towards numeracy.

The interview tests essentially a candidate's ability in a face to face verbal exchange, but there are inbuilt marks awarded for level of performance at the degree examination (eligibility requirement), positions held in university student bodies, achievements in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

All-in-all the above method is a sensible one with emphasis on the ability to display ones mental alertness through written exercises. Those who emerge victorious in this strenuous exercise, it is argued, would have the intellectual potential to shoulder the responsibilities of public office.

Recruitment of young persons with intellectual promise is only the start. This recruitment method is further augmented through on the job experience in progressively difficult postings in the public service and also Efficiency Bar Examinations and promotion examinations. In addition, promotion to Class I of the SLAS is dependent on officers obtaining a postgraduate qualification of at least Master's Level from a recognized university (Ibid, Sec. 14).

In theory, the scheme is excellent and is intended to keep officers mentally alert through on-the-job experience and academic exercises. In practice, the work milieu plays an important part in conditioning an officer's mind and outlook. Is the officer permitted to perform his duties honestly with due regard to legal-rational criteria or is he expected to seek directions from politically powerful personages on matters that are merely administrative or technical. This work environment can make an immense difference to the way an officer conditions his mind on his way up the career ladder. A serious incongruence between personal values and the value system of the work environment can have a deleterious effect on the morale of an individual officer and on his efficiency.

A formal performance appraisal system was introduced in 1998 (PA Circulars No. PA/07/1988 of 13.03.1998 and 16.03.1998). Prior to this work assessment was done through annual confidential reports filled in by superiors. The employee had no chance to see how the superior evaluated him/ her. In most cases evaluations were based on personal attributes, not on objective criteria. Apart from transparency the other motivation

for performance appraisal was to link performance to employee's salary increment and promotion.

A researcher who did a study of this scheme in operation found it to be flawed due to the following reasons (de Alwis, 2013): lack of knowledge of officials on how to use the appraisal method, inadequate participation of appraisers in the preparation of work plans and reluctance of appraisers to make harsh evaluations due to cultural norms. Her summation was that everyone gets a satisfactory rating at the end of the year irrespective of the performance.

### **Selection of Persons by the Constitutional Council**

The 17th Amendment to the Constitution entrusted the task of nominating suitable persons for appointment to the independent commissions to the Constitutional Council (CC) chaired by the Speaker of Parliament (Article 41B, 17th Amendment). This CC had a membership of ten persons (including PM and Leader of the Opposition) of whom three were former Supreme Court Judges. In addition, the President's nominee on the CC was a distinguished President's Counsel who had established a reputation for honesty and integrity. They set about their task with meticulous probity and explained the procedure they had followed in making the selections in a report to Parliament dated 20 November 2002 (Parliament, 2002).

It must be emphasized that the CC was on the look-out for mature experienced professionals who had distinguished themselves in work either in the public sector or private sector. So, the option of written examinations was not an appropriate technique.

First of all the CC enunciated general criteria that should be observed in identifying prospective candidates: impartiality and independence of mind, free of political party activity, career record displaying personal integrity and, in particular, the person should not have been

- a) convicted of an offence involving moral turpitude,
- b) adjudged insolvent,
- c) found guilty of professional or ethical misconduct
- d) a debtor to the Inland Revenue Department, and
- e) associating with persons involved in criminal activities, gambling, narcotics trade and the manufacture or sale of alcohol (Ibid, p.40).

The CC next established a database by inviting the following to nominate two persons each who were “persons of eminence and integrity who had distinguished themselves in public life and who were not members of any political party” (Ibid, p.44):

- i. Members of Parliament (225)
- ii. OPA (01)
- iii. Organizations affiliated to the OPA (34)
- iv. Chambers of Commerce and Industry (29)
- v. Sri Lanka Federation of University Women (01)

The responses were not that encouraging. Collectively the MPs nominated only 77 persons, the 34 professional associations only 30, the 29 trade chambers only 15. The members of the CC themselves nominated 56 persons.

A comment is due at this stage on this method of nomination adopted by the CC. MPs are persons who pursue patron-client relationships. Their closest associates are fellow camp-followers. So, to them, searching for persons of integrity who are not political sycophants is not a game they are used to playing. The professional associations did not want to venture outside their current office-bearers. The trade chambers were too pre-occupied with business activity to pay much attention to national causes. The result was a dearth of good nominations.

Also, the CC missed the bus in adopting the above procedure in preference to the time-tested method of calling for applications from interested persons who qualified in terms of the general criteria it had enunciated. Of course, there would have been applications by the cartload, but this is a technical problem that could have been tackled through computerization and proper scheduling. Furthermore, its decision to call for nominations from MPs was somewhat at variance with the principle of being free of political obligations. Politicians as a rule do expect favours to be returned on a later date. By not calling for applications and opening out the nomination process to interested persons the CC unwittingly shut out a large number of qualified persons who may have not been aware that a “head hunt” was in progress.

In keeping with its concern for probity, the CC delegated the task of identifying good candidates from the database it had setup to a sub-committee in which the three politicians (Speaker, PM and Leader of the Opposition) were excluded. The CC adopted a marking scheme to assess the relative merits of the prospective candidates. A few illustrative examples are given below (Ibid, p.45).

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| i. Judge of the SC; Governor of CB; Auditor-General;<br>Commissioner General of Inland Revenue | 20 marks |
| ii. Judge of CA; Ministry Secretary; Vice-Chancellor;<br>Ambassador; IGP; President's Counsel  | 18 marks |
| iii. CEO of a public company   | 12 marks |
| iv. President OPA  | 10marks  |
| President of Professional Body   | 07marks  |
| Secretary OPA or Professional Body   | 04marks  |
| v. Honors and Distinctions (each 05 marks)   |          |
| Total not to exceed  | 15marks  |
| vi. First degree   | 05marks  |
| Higher degree  | 10marks  |
| vii. Professional qualification  | 05marks  |
| Higher professional qualification  | 10marks  |

It will be seen that the intention was to identify persons who had held responsible positions in the public and private sectors and also to give due weightage to academic and professional qualifications. Eventually, it was decided that only persons who had scored a minimum of 45 marks should be considered for nomination to the independent commissions (Ibid, p.46).

One can discern the hallmark of the Supreme Court in the rigorous marking scheme described above. Perhaps, the presence of three Justices and a preponderance of eminent lawyers in the CC may have contributed to its adoption. From the time promotions within the public service fell within the jurisdiction of FR applications to the SC, the Court has been grappling with the issue of adjudicating on claims made by Petitioners that their legitimate entitlement for promotion had been ignored by the Appointing Authority. The most litigious were members of the Police Department. No promotion can be made within it at any level without a horde of police officers running to the SC with FR applications, amply assisted by lawyers who have made an industry of FR litigation. A perusal of the stereotyped format in which these Petitions are lodged in the Court Registry will lend credence to this cynical view.

The SC had no opportunity to interview, or even speak to, the complainants or those whose promotion had been challenged. Everything was handled through lawyers and affidavits. So, it had to devise a scheme to rationalize the whole dispute and base its judgment. The upshot was the structured marking scheme involving quantification of desirable attributes. Whilst a structured marking scheme can serve the purpose of settling a dispute when a dispute arises, it is not very helpful in selections especially on how to evaluate "honesty and integrity". What is the use of all these

attributes for which marks are assigned if a person is lacking in integrity?

Finally, what was the outcome of the CC's search for talent? It would be unethical to discuss individuals; hence, a few general comments would be offered. Right at the outset the then President threw a spanner in the works by refusing to appoint the person nominated as Chairman of the Elections Commission. This led to a stalemate which resulted in this important institution not being established. An important fledgling institution was given a Head who had little time to spare from his busy professional work schedule. The CC did not realize that the need was for a full-time occupant. Some nominees whose scholarship and experience lay in fields far removed from the nitty-gritty of public management were all at sea and remained as silent partners to decision-making. Those from the business sector were more pre-occupied with their private business to make an in-depth study of the complex issues placed before them. In one isolated incident the CC was forced, after due inquiry, to remove one of its nominees for taking an unethical interest in the promotion of a sibling.

It must be said, however, that a few dedicated individuals trained in the stable of classical public service kept the ships afloat. The moral of this summation is that there is no fool-proof method of identifying good persons, though a structured marking scheme is a useful tool.

### **Selecting Cricketers for the National Team**

From public service appointments to cricket is a long hop. Nevertheless, the cricketing arena presents one of the best examples of excellence in the method of recruitment.

The selection process begins very early in the school Cricket Competition. Young boys are picked up for their talent, coached and put through intensive practice sessions. Every school likes to pick the best for the job because it is the reputation of the school that is at stake. In an earlier era only a few elite schools played "Big Matches", now every big town has a school "Big Match". Even in the Jaffna peninsula school cricket competition has now resumed after a lapse of several decades.

School leavers with cricketing talent are attracted to the prestigious cricket clubs centered mainly in Colombo, because clubs need a constant infusion of new-blood. The club cricket circuit is highly competitive with an established league table. Every club seeks to retain its position in the premier league. Talent and ability are the crucial attributes to be sought in the young men; all other considerations are secondary. Performance is

judged on the field on a continuing basis; those who score runs regularly or get wickets become prized possessions of these clubs.

From club cricket to the national squad is a giant leap. Many club cricketers fall by the wayside in the process. The national squad is selected purely on recent performance in the club circuit. Prolific run-getters or wicket takers get the early nod. Still others struggle for several years before getting the call. The honour of being selected to the national team requires good performance, opportunity and a bit of luck. A vacancy has to occur in the regular team either through retirement or poor performance of a regular player. Once you make the grade and join the team, you have to perform consistently. You have not only to satisfy the coaches and selectors but also the fans that throng to watch matches. Of special importance at this level are the professional cricket commentators who write to the newspapers regularly. They will vivisection every aspect of your game and at times tear you up into pieces. A good cricketer has to be mentally gritty to perform and survive in such a work milieu. To those who excel in this game of survival lucrative international contracts are on offer as reward.

In contrast to the two earlier methods of recruitment this method is unique. Academic and professional qualifications are not important. Some get professional training in cricket academies, but this is not crucial. Performance on the job is the sole criterion. Once you make the grade you have to continue to perform. Fortunately, scoring runs and getting wickets are objective measures of performance; measures over which there is universal agreement. And, every match played becomes another examination for the cricketer, who is subject to a rigorous regime of continuous assessment.

Having made complimentary comments about cricket, a word of caution has to be added. A former Selector (himself a great national cricketer) has indicated that influential parents try to get their sons included in the school team (Pathiravithana, 2013). He draws a sharp distinction between encouraging a child in his activities and interference in school selection and coaching matters. Ultimately, it is the child who will get humiliated when he fails on the field.

Also, there are rumours that Cricket Board Selectors have their favourites, but once again the favoured individuals have to prove their worth on the field or get pushed out.

## **Conclusion**

What lessons can be drawn from the three methods of recruitment

described above. Obviously, each method is designed for the specific purpose for which it was intended. When you are searching for young persons to fill vacancies in the SLAS, you cannot ask them of the public service positions they have held because they have just passed out of the university. Nor can they be appraised in a specific job the way cricketers are tested on the field. Hence, a recruitment method with emphasis on written examinations is the most appropriate. It is only an identification of potential. What happens thereafter is conditioned by several imponderables. Can their performance be appraised in a job in the way a cricketer's is measured through runs and wickets. There are no truly objective yardsticks to measure performance on the job. In fact, the wide variety of postings SLAS officers of the same batch are given at any given time (some are in tough assignments whilst others are in soft-assignments) make a meaningful standardized measure of assessment impossible. Some superiors are strict whilst others are lenient, so that personal bias can creep into an assessment. Though a Performance Appraisal Scheme was introduced in 1998, it has had little impact on improved performance in the public service.

Having stated this, in conclusion, it must be said that the cricketing arena provides the best example of a method of recruitment. Its use of objective measures of performance and the commitment of managements (be it school, club or national selectors) to constantly search for the best talent makes it worthy of emulation in other spheres.

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