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## Business Recruitment

# Sorry, the computer is saying 'no'

IT'S known as mini-me syndrome. Executives and others involved in the recruitment process subconsciously have a bias to choose employees who are similar to themselves. This unconscious instinct to recruit in our own image restricts the future mix of organisations, so the use of computers to sift applications should be welcomed by candidates who can shine on their talents not because the interviewer has taken a shine to them.

However, there is deep scepticism about the use of computer programs, with process-driven recruitment described as too blunt a tool to spot the right candidate at a recent Association of Professional Staffing Companies conference on talent acquisition. Several distinguished recruitment experts who attended said that "disintermediation" – using technology to remove the recruitment intermediary – could not replace human judgment.

Tom Marsden, director of professional services at Alexander Mann Solutions, says that while technology can be useful for sifting large quantities of CVs, it is fundamentally a blunt instrument. Marc van den Berg says that OgilvyOne used very little technology in the recruitment process. Advertising, he says, was about creativity, which is a quality that technology simply cannot measure.

However, major recruiters – sometimes inundated with tens of thousands of CVs – often have no option but to use online computer programs to screen the sheer volume of applications they are now receiving.

### A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

Bringing science into the equation also makes the recruitment process much fairer and helps organisations to identify those candidates who can make the business more productive and profitable in the future.

SHL, the talent assessments firm which conducts 25 million assessments across the world every year, is now launching a Talent Analytics database of scientifically based talent assessment data and intelligence to help recruiters identify the best candidates for their business.

"Most organisations recognise people are their most important asset, but few have real insight into employees' future potential or where the company workforce sit against competitors," says David Leigh, CEO of SHL.

"We have seen a growing demand for intelligence that can help businesses make better talent recruitment and development decisions, and most importantly, measure those decisions in the context of their competition and the industry as a whole."

SHL has been capturing People Intelligence data for 30 years on the



Mean machine: in the TV show *Little Britain*, David Walliams plays a rude office worker dependent on the computer

Technology is increasingly being used to select recruits. However, computerised assessments have been criticised as too blunt a tool to spot the right candidates. So what does this mean for jobseekers, particularly if they can't tick all the boxes? By **Niki Chesworth**

effectiveness of employees at work – from operational front-line staff, to executive leaders in both the private and public sector, and across all industries around the world. It is this data that organisations can tap into to gain insights into the talent they attract, on-the-job performance and leadership potential.

"It is very dangerous for a business to clone people," says Eugene Burke, SHL's chief scientist. "That is why clients want us to help make the process more scientific and impartial. They recognise that the world is changing and they need to review their talent to see if it fits in with

the future. Technology can also deal with the sheer volume of applications.

"One firm we work with received 45,000 graduate applications a couple of years ago but that has now soared to 100,000. That is why they are now putting online assessments right at the front of the recruitment process before they even look at qualifications and experience, because it is not just what a candidate knows but what they are going to do with what they know that counts. A fairer, evidenced-based approach enables organisations to be more intelligent about their people. "They may want to re-engineer their

organisation in some way or have decided that there are critical goals that need to be achieved. That could be a change in the way they interact with customers or the leadership of the organisations in a new global market. "They may need to drive more efficiency, improve team work or be more innovative and to do this they need a shift in their talent strategy.

"The next step is to look at the attributes of the people they need by looking at the top talent within their organisation, among competitors and across the sector. Then they need to identify those talented individuals who

### HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?

ARE you good at solving problems? Do you communicate effectively? Find out more about how assessment tests can reveal your strengths and weaknesses, and familiarise yourself with what to expect when faced with a test, at [shldirect.com/practice-tests.html](http://shldirect.com/practice-tests.html). The site contains a range of online practice tests including verbal reasoning, verbal comprehension and numerical reasoning tests as well as a personality questionnaire and situational judgment test.

match these requirements. This is usually a mix of 'can do' – usually reasoning or numerical tests which are often done online – and 'will do', which takes the form of a widely used occupational personality questionnaire with candidates asked to make choices between different statements. The final test is 'will fit', which takes the form of scenario-based assessments based on typical work situations."

### IDENTIFYING FUTURE STARS

Analytics can also help organisations to build a talent pipeline by identifying which of their people has what it takes to succeed to the next leadership level.

"We use our database to look at those who perform well in closely matching roles," adds Burke. "With one cable company we identified the upper quartile of their 3,000 employees and found that they were 19 per cent faster at learning competencies and were likely to generate 25 per cent more revenue as well as three times more likely to manage their staff more effectively.

"So this information can help organisations to identify the people who will be more productive. It can also help with internal succession planning by identifying internal talent through simulation exercises."

### ...AND SOMETIMES THE COMPUTER SAYS 'YES'

Many major recruiters have now created online scenario-based tests to get a sense of which candidates will work best within the organisation. These may be short quizzes of five to seven questions to find out if the candidate will fit in well within the organisation.

"It is not about the computer saying no," adds Burke. "These assessments give a sense of strengths and weaknesses and look at whether you have the talents that the recruiter is looking for, not just the qualifications.

"There is a risk to the recruiter if you do not fit the role and for the candidate too as they may be better suited to a different work environment."

## Move to improve your job chances

TWO-THIRDS of us would move jobs in an instant if we were offered a better one despite economic uncertainty and unemployment fears, according to a survey from recruiter Hays.

However, despite longer hours and stagnant pay, many of us are surprisingly happy in our work, with more than four in 10 of those who are

not looking for new employment saying they are staying put because they like their current job.

Workers in London top the league of those most keen to move to another role, with 49 per cent saying they want to switch jobs while many more are open to offers. Charles Logan, director at Hays, says: "These results

indicate just how much the British workforce has suffered in recent years. Many workers are overworked and don't always appreciate that there are opportunities out there for talented people. Employers need to take urgent steps to re-engage and motivate staff, or they risk losing skilled and experienced workers."

## Overworked and underpaid?

UK workers are putting in a total of 26 million of extra unpaid hours in the workplace each day, according to a study from Aviva which found that six in 10 employees regularly put in an average of 1.5 hours unpaid overtime a day.

As a result more than a quarter of us report that we feel tired all the

time and nearly as many say they feel really stressed.

While one in five say they work longer for the love of the job, most extra hours are put in because employees claim they have too much work (41 per cent) or because they want to give a good impression to the boss (20 per cent).

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