

Attracting and recruiting quality talent: firm perspectives

Recruiting
quality talent

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Abstract

Purpose – Understanding matching patterns and determinants of attracting quality talents is an under-researched area, especially from a firm perspective. Firm's recruitment strategies have an impact on the sorting patterns in the labour market which remains undetermined. This paper aims to explore the drivers of attracting and recruiting quality talents. Also, the role of policies including the national labour laws, industry norms and localised firm policies have on hiring practices and drivers in a developing country.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is underpinned by network theory, equity theory, social exchange theory and resource-based theory. The authors leveraged on a mixed methodology that is a structured questionnaire administered to 200 firm representatives in Lagos and interviews with key informants from the demand side for labour.

Findings – The study revealed that firms can leverage on salary, brand name, referral, job security as core factors in attracting and recruiting quality talents. Also, digitisation is a key strategy leveraged on attracting and recruiting quality talents. Techniques such as the use of social media, traditional media, online interviews, physical interviews have proven to help in selecting quality talents.

Originality/value – Specifically, the paper throws light on how firms use different recruitment channels for hiring workers, and how the use of these channels affects the quality of matches. Furthermore, the role of social networks, wages and benefits for firm recruitment and matching efficiency was well highlighted.

Keywords Recruitment, Firms, Wages, Labour market, Quality talents

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Attention has recently given to understand how organisations source for their workforce, because employees are widely recognised as valuable assets that organisations can leverage upon for survival and attaining competitive advantage. Firms are constrained with a number of challenges in achieving their production objectives (Deakins and Bensemman,

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2019; Fowowe, 2017). With an increasing rate of unemployment in sub Saharan Africa (Abraham and Nosa, 2018; Ihensekhien and Aisien, 2019), and a focus on decent employment (Moen *et al.*, 2020), the effort of all stakeholders in the labour market is worth exploring. Understanding matching patterns and determinants of attracting quality talents is an under researched area especially from the firm perspective (Ghavidel *et al.*, 2019). Firms recruitment strategies have impacts on the sorting patterns in the labour market which remains undetermined (Hensvik and Skans, 2016; Nekoei and Weber, 2017). Furthermore, recruiting quality talent enhances productivity and performance which every firm strives to achieve (Cascio, 2014; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017). Lagos has about 6,000 registered firms cutting across various industries (Nigeria Companies Directory (NCD), 2020). The number of available talents is approximately 9 million youths as at 2020 (World Population Review, 2020).

In developed countries, there are generally openly known industry and role compensation packages (Adom, 2018; Clemens *et al.*, 2017). Different roles have a range of rate per hour or per year. This is however not the same for most sectors in Lagos, Nigeria. Firms which are unable to attract the best talents have issues with productivity and output. Firms in Lagos compete with global companies for their local talent and can easily loose the talent to countries like Canada, Australia and other countries open to immigrant of skilled talents (Marsh and Oyelere, 2018; Chand and Tung, 2019). Lagos has a high influx of fresh graduates and also concentration of experienced professionals. The competition for exceptional talent is fierce, and they typically not always on the lookout for job opportunities at least actively (Mahony, 2019; Kireru, 2019). Some of these exceptional talents too already are engaged in freelancing and private practice (Perampalam *et al.*, 2017; Schwartz, 2018), some calibers of professionals are social media savvy; others are no, and not be easily visible for opportunities. While the professionals typically talk and engage with each other and share information around compensation and benefits; therefore, the firms are not always this cooperative as they compete for the scare talents (Chunyan *et al.*, 2015).

Lagos is the “industrial and commercial hub” of Nigeria and the most industrialised state in the country (Ikpe and Torriti, 2018). Lagos accounts for 80% of the value-added growth in Nigeria’s manufacturing sector and generates 65% of Nigeria’s value added tax (VAT) (Central Bank of Nigeria 2017). Lagos is also the financial capital of the country. It has more than 200 well capitalised and efficiently managed banking and financial institutions (Juliana and Okoye, 2016; Adewale, 2018). Lagos accommodates the largest number of businesses among all the states in the federation and 11.5% of small businesses in Nigeria (Small Medium and Development Agency of Nigeria, 2013). Lagos has a large population of about 17.5 million as of 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics report, 2018) which translates into a huge market for goods and services. It is home to the Apapa and the Tin Can Island seaport that handles 70% of total national cargo freight in Nigeria; this has increased her need for recruitment of quality talents by firms operating in the state.

With an average graduate churn out of 600,000 by tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the graduate unemployment put at 25.4 m or 38.1% (NBS, 2019, Q2), it looks like sourcing for employees should be easy. However, many employers of labour lament that they find it difficult to fill vacant roles (Eneji *et al.*, 2013; Longe, 2017). Getting a quality candidate out of a large pool is difficult due to the quality of candidates and lack of workplace readiness (Aloysius, 2019; Silva and Crisp, 2020). Consequently, multiple layers of assessment and screening are put in place at a great cost by firms to sieve through the crowd and pick out the best and brightest. On the other hand, the exceptional graduates who are few are conscious of their worth and value and hence highly mobile (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016;

Hu, 2017; Okolie and Irabor, 2017). This is particularly true of the younger generation called Millennial. This is part of the challenge firm faces in attracting and retaining quality talents.

Therefore, to be at the forefront in retaining talents, firm brand need to display the capability of projecting the image and personality of the organisation as an attractive employer of labour, exposing employee to its guiding principles, ideals, code of conduct as a way of attracting, engaging and retaining quality talents (Drury, 2016; Dabirian *et al.*, 2017). Also, Chabra and Sharma (2014) opined that determinants of workplace attractiveness such as compensation, career opportunities, nature of the job and corporate culture should be communicated by the employer brand to enable organisations to attract, engage and retain talents.

This research therefore explores the drivers of attracting and recruiting quality talents, and the roles that national labour laws, industry norms and localised firm policies have on hiring practices and drivers in developing country. Specifically, this paper tends to throw more light on the following research questions: how do firms use different recruitment channels for hiring workers, and how does the use of these channels affect the quality of matches? What is the role of social networks for firm recruitment and for matching efficiency? To what extent do firms use wages and other benefits to improve their hiring process? Are recruited talents productive and capable of improving performance?

2. Literature review

2.1 Employee recruitment

Recruitment has a long history, most likely to pre-historic times because people tend to consume the services of others to achieve what they cannot singlehandedly accomplish (Adetunji and Ogbonna, 2013). The process of searching for the best candidates and attracting them to consider job offers is regarded as recruitment (Cole, 2005; Bhupendra and Swati, 2015). However, when an organisation ended up either erroneously or intentionally hiring the wrong candidates for its jobs, then it becomes a liability or a huge cost that might negatively affect the business activities of such a firm (Ekwoaba *et al.*, 2015). This has therefore made recruitment process a human resource strategy that can determine the fortune of an organisation, because, getting high-quality talents and competent workforce is a key source of sustainable competitive advantage (Hiltrop, 1999; Bondarouk *et al.*, 2014). Acquiring and retaining superior talent through appropriate recruitment process is critical to firm's image (Oginni and Ogunyomi, 2012; Bouton, 2015). It is a valuable weapon for an organisation that has workforce of good quality talent (Tlaiss *et al.*, 2017).

2.2 Employee recruitment process

Recruiting talented workforce is critical to a firm's success and superior performance, but to hire the most talented, effective recruitment process needs to be considered (Breaugh, 2009). It is argued by this author that no best way to hire best talented, but the situation at a point determines the best method to apply. However, Figure 1 demonstrates a recruitment process as proposed by Breaugh (2009).

The model in Figure 1 indicates that, for an organisation to hire talent to fill a gap, the first thing to do is to strategically formulate recruitment objectives. This could be carried out by seeking inputs from those that have vital information about the skills required and the particular unit that is in need of such talent. The second phase of the model maintains that there should be a coherent strategy to fill the gap through specific plan of actions (Breaugh, 2009). The third phase of the model is about exploring all possible channels through which the needed talent can be acquired, either internally or externally. Most human resources managers are concerned about whether their outcomes meet their original

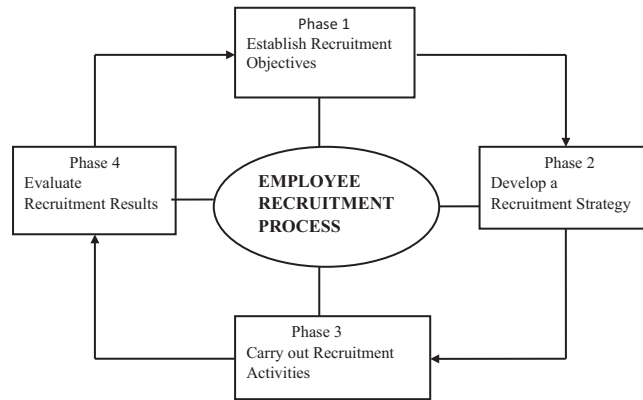


Figure 1.
Employee
recruitment process

Source: Breugh (2009). Recruiting and attracting talent: A guide to understanding and managing the recruitment process

objectives, but unfortunately, some many firms do not formally appraise recruitment efforts (Breugh, 2009; Carlson *et al.*, 2002). Measuring and evaluating results in the fourth phase of the model involves comparing the current result with the previous data either from within or information from universities, recruiting agencies, consulting firms or any other external source. The model is cyclical in nature because firms continuously engage in hiring talent to fill gaps as long as they still exist.

2.3 Sources of recruitment

Recruitment can be carried out either by the organisation itself or contracting it out to an external body through outsourcing. However, selecting the most effective recruitment source is situational and it has its attendant benefits and challenges according to Arthur (2004). Some of the recruitment sources, their benefits and challenges are demonstrated in Table 1.

2.4 Social media

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is an internet-based platform that allows users to generate and exchange ideas, contents and values. For this reason, social media has increasingly played a crucial role in human resources management in general and hiring quality talent in particular (Landers and Schmidt, 2016). Landers and Schmidt (2016) opine that social network sites contain three major features such as allow users to generate a public personal profile; specify a list of connections with others using sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; and observe and explore content from within and connections of others to achieve a purpose. Adopting social media platforms for recruitment has its benefits and challenges. Most opinion in the practice of social media-assisted employee hiring is informal, unsystematic, muddled and anecdotal (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2013; Landers and Schmidt, 2016). However, social recruiting approach can offer speed, efficiency and the firm's ability to target and attract suitable candidates, and as well provide useful and additional information about a potential candidate or job seeker (Emanuela, 2018).

The internet has offered many companies the opportunity of reducing the burden of recruitment and they have keyed into it in their recruitment process (Mindia and Hoque,

Source	Benefits	Challenges
Advertising	Wide audience	Not cost-efficient
Direct mail	Selective and personalised	Time-consuming and opening of mails may be frustrating
Firm-sponsored social event	Cost-efficient	Possibility of 'sales pitch' resent by attendees
Electronic recruitment	Cost-efficient and paperwork reduction	Possibility of having a large number of unskilled applicants
Employment agencies	Large pool of applicants	Not cost-efficient and unqualified applicants
Professional association	Cost-efficient and personal referrals	Possibility of having rejected applicants by someone else
Newspaper inserts	Easily removed	Can be easily overlooked and lost
Campus recruiting	Possibility of selecting best and top students	Not cost-efficient
Government agencies	Cost-efficient and large pool of applicants	Possibility of unqualified applicants
Job posting	Time and cost-efficient, revealing hidden skills and creation of openings at lower level	Lack of control by managers, and bitterness of an employee who posts for job levels

Notes: Fundamentals of human resources management

Source: Arthur (2004)

Table 1.
Sources of
recruitment

2018). Against the huge time and resource required in screening qualified candidates, given a large pool of applicant. Software have now been a veritable tool in the screening of applicant (Omolawal, 2015). The internet provides an avenue for online aptitude test and assessment which is becoming more popular and widely acceptable in the selection and requirement of quality talents (Randall, 2016; Ujah-Ogbuagu, 2019). Interview process is aided with video conferencing, reducing cost of transport and other associated risk, offer letter can be gotten through the internet, e-signing allows acceptance or rejection of an offer online without much stress (Petre *et al.*, 2016).

In another vain, the development of database which allows job seeker upload their curriculum vitae provides an avenue for recruiters to search for candidates that suit vacant roles, it also allows those who are willing to change job to apply without being very active in job search (Fiandrino *et al.*, 2016; Leach *et al.*, 2017). Among software being used are HR software, Application Tracking System (ATS), web 2.0 Artificial Intelligence (AI) among many others. Albert (2019) and Son *et al.* (2019). The use of internet further positively improves the corporate image and profile of firms, reduction in recruitment cost, administrative burden are some of the benefit of using the internet as a recruiting platform (Fred and Kinange, 2018).

3. Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by network theory, equity theory, social exchange theory and resource-based theory. Network theory is proposed by Johanson and Mattsson (1988) in with the postulation that every business venture makes use of available networks to acquire resources both human and material to achieve its goals and objectives. The network theory is useful in this study to address the issue of how firms in Lagos relate and network with the business environment to make use of the available recruiting channels through social

networking for them to source and recruit quality talents. However, networking alone may not be able to resolve the issue because employees will like to take the jobs that seem fair to them according to equity theory as postulated by Adams (1963). Organisations sometimes find it difficult to recruit and select employees with the right qualifications to help realise goals, but the appropriate recruitment and selection is that which gives every applicant an equal opportunity (Deshpande and Golhar, 1994; Atkinson and Storey, 1994).

Every organisation is a social entity that takes inputs from the environment and in returns, sends outputs back to the same environment. For this reason, firms engage in social exchange. Social exchange theory has gained much interest in the literature and has been applied in understanding workplace behaviour (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), such as psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995) and networks (Brass *et al.*, 2004). One of the major arguments of this theory is that, it is an exchange of values or actions between individuals (Homans, 1961); therefore, the extent to which firms use wages and other benefits in their hiring process may attract quality talents that will serve as valuable assets. Human resource is a valuable asset for an organisation, because resource based theory has maintained that competitive advantages can be attained by the firm's resources that are rare (Barney, 1991, 2001).

4. Data, methods and descriptive analysis

4.1 Methods

The paper leveraged on mixed methodology. We are motivated to use this research method because of its potential to confirm research findings through triangulation, gather richer data, and to initiate new modes of thinking (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Denscombe, 2008). We adopted both survey and also interviews with key informants (Marshall, 1996). The key informant technique was adopted to obtain quality insights and information data within a short period and also practical solutions (Marshall, 1996). The key informants were identified upfront and were selected based on the fact that they are opinion and thought leaders in the Human Resource space. Twenty key informants were identified and interviewed successfully.

We used structured interview with open-ended and closed-ended questions and interviews with key informants from the demand side for labour. We conducted the primary survey within the first quarter of 2020, administering 200 questionnaires in a five-point Likert scale form to human resource managers who advise the organisations management on people matters including recruitment and attraction of new employees; representatives of employers of labour from the organised private sector and government agencies based in Lagos.

For the sample size, we leverage on the 250 population of the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association.

We arrived at the sample size (150) by applying the Yamane formula for determining the sample size given by:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

where

n = corrected sample size

N = population size and e = Margin of error (MoE)

e = 0.05 based on the research condition (Yamane, 1967; Singh and Masuku, 2013).

However, we reached out to 200 people to accommodate for no response or invalid responses and to have a more robust in-depth. The study used descriptive statistics (Boodhoo and Purmessur, 2009) to provide inference from data gathered. Descriptive statistics was used as data obtained are qualitative, in a form of likert scale question.

The population cuts across all the different sectors and industry as a cross-sectional approach was taken to the survey using simple random sampling to provide equal opportunities to all Human Resource managers across all sectors within the membership base. The survey was administered using google survey to the participants who were informed of the purpose of the survey. Of the 200 questionnaires, 168 was returned while 18 was incomplete, 150 was valid and therefore used in the course of the study. We proceed to use descriptive analysis to generate insights from the data generated.

4.2 Data analyses

4.2.1 Result presentation. In attracting suitable talents by firm, several factors contribute to the choice of candidate selected.

In carrying out this study, firms in the private sector form the majority, constituting 79% of the sample; this is because private firms carry out recruitment processes more when compared to the private sector. Hence, they have better contribution than the public sector. From the respondents, most firms hire senior members of the organisation from outside the firm with the belief that they will be able to inject fresh ideas that will aid productivity and performance (Table 2).

The impact of digitisation is evident on the recruitment process of the firms; most of them took advantage of technology to drive their selection, training and placement processes. From the sample, 46% do not state salary when placing advertisement, stating that it mostly gives rise to higher application and makes it difficult to select those who are passionate about the job, while a higher salary scale attracts many candidates, a lower salary scale can further put candidates off including capable candidates. However, 29%

	N	(%)
<i>Type of organisation</i>		
Private company	75	79
Public agency	20	21
<i>Do you hire for senior or other roles from within or outside your organisation?</i>		
Within	25	26
Outside	70	74
<i>How use of internet platforms, AI and other examples of digitisation affect the hiring policies of firms?</i>		
Positively	78	82
Uncertain	14	15
No impact	3	3
<i>Do you specify a salary range when you communicate your vacancies?</i>		
No	44	46
Some times	20	20
Yes	31	29
<i>Do you outline benefits when you communicate your vacancies</i>		
Yes	52	55
Not always	19	20
No	24	25

Source: Authors computation 2020

Table 2.
Recruitment process

include salary range in calling for application. Overall, firms outline benefit attached to a vacant position when seeking qualified candidates.

In attracting quality talents, firms leverage on some certain factors, among such factor is salary, brand name, flexible working conditions among other. Table 3 highlights the effect of such factors in attracting and recruiting quality talents.

Expert in the human capital believe strongly that firm can leverage on salary, brand name, referral, job security as core factors in attracting and recruiting quality talents. Among the respondents, there are divergent opinions about job title as a core factor in attracting and recruiting quality talents, for instance, 36% agreed, 41% disagreed, while 22% are uncertain of the importance of job title as a factor to leverage on in attracting and recruiting quality talents. Outsourcing and recruiting agencies are seen as a viable factor to leverage on in attracting and recruiting quality talents most of the respondents agreed to their impact. There is also a mix feeling about flexible working opportunities as a factor to leverage on in attracting and recruiting quality talents. In the bid to attract quality talents, job security play a vital role, employee are always looking for jobs that can guarantee them long time job security; therefore, firm with job security leverage on such goodwill to attract talent unlike firms that do not guarantee job security.

Firm overtime develops certain criteria which form porting of the selection process. Indeed, many of such criteria have barred many from being considered in the selection process. Table 4 gives a breakdown of the position of the respondents when asked about their thought on such criteria in selection process. While most of the respondents are in favour of Bachelor of Science over Higher National Diploma, as a factor to consider in the selection process, many are also of the opinion that the class of degree obtained in various institution of learning is also a strong criterion to consider. They favour first-class candidate and those with second-class upper over those with lower grades such as second-class lower, third class and pass.

When it comes to school attended by candidates, about 57% of the respondents believe there should not be discrimination between those who went to private, federal and state schools. Furthermore, age and gender of candidate should not be a barrier to their being selected. However, some respondents are of the opinion that there are some certain positions that cannot be managed by a person of lower age or gender.

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Salary as core talent attraction	4.2	14.7	7.4	47.24	26.3
Brand name as core talent attraction	2.1	–	18.1	61.1	17.9
Referral as core talent attraction	4.2	5.3	14.7	38.9	36.8
Job title as core talent attraction	13.7	27.4	22.1	30.5	6.3
Location as core talent attraction	–	24.2	40.0	26.3	9.5
Outsourcing agency to secure talent	11.6	9.5	27.4	34.7	16.8
Recruitment agency to secure talent	11.6	7.4	29.5	26.3	25.3
Flexible working opportunities	4.2	30.5	18.9	30.5	15.8
Job security	4.2	14.7	28.4	20.0	32.6

Table 3.
What firms leverage on to attract talents in Lagos

Source: Authors compilation 2020

Aside from leveraging on some key factors in attracting quality talents, techniques applied in the selection process was considered. Techniques such as the use of social media, traditional media (television, newspapers and radio), online interview, physical interview, etc., were considered. Respondents were asked to evaluate the impact of the technique in attracting and recruiting quality talents, the result is presented in Table 5.

Recruiters believe that the social media platform is a good technique to attract suitable candidates. Uncertainty was expressed in their opinion on traditional media such as newspaper, television and radio, they believe the impact may not be measurable and may lead to pool of unskilled applicant; furthermore, talent targeted at may not see such advert. Respondents are in agreement with using professional and personal networks to attract quality talents, it is believed that professionals are able to identify and recommend talents that are capable of filling vacant positions. In face of ever improving technology, online interviews and assessment are been embraced by recruiters and found to be a good technique to attract quality talent, physical assessment of talents have also proven to be a good technique in attracting quality talents.

4.2.2 Qualitative data analysis-interview. In the face of modern trend in the labour space, respondents were asked to suggest modifications that can be adopted or suitable for firms to attract and recruit quality talent. The expert feedback generally aligned with the feedback from the administered questionnaires. Some of their responses are standardisation of benefits within industries and salary disclosure in all advertisements; review of labour laws to cover electronic recruitment, remote working and emerging work situations. Also more investment by firm management in technology tools such as artificial intelligence and digitalisation should be embraced at work place. Furthermore, candidates are advised to be

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
HND and BSc	8.4	17.9	13.7	31.7	28.4
Class of Degree	10.5	17.9	18.9	32.6	20.0
School nature (state, federal, private foreign and local)	26.3	31.6	15.8	9.5	16.8
Youth and old candidates	25.3	8.4	25.3	22.1	18.9
Male and female candidates	28.4	23.2	23.2	8.4	16.8

Table 4.
Selection criteria in recruitment

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Social media	14.7	13.7	32.6	25.3	13.7
Traditional media	5.3	3.2	65.3	15.8	10.5
Own professional and personal networks	–	2.1	18.9	28.4	50.5
Physical interview	–	–	12.6	54.7	32.6
Online interview	–	17.9	42.1	31.6	8.4
Online assessment	3.2	8.4	46.3	28.4	13.7
Physical assessment	2.1	2.1	24.2	35.8	35.8

Table 5.
Extent to which respondent agree or disagree with below techniques in attracting and recruiting quality talents

Source: Author computation 2020

more tech savvy and familiarise themselves with modern apps and gadgets as traditional recruitment would soon be the exception rather than the rule. Firms also use technology to drive feedback to applicants and carry them along on their interview status.

In the bid to improve organisational policies with respect to recruitment, suggestions were made by the respondents, such suggestions are as follows: Organisations are encouraged to leverage more on technology, do first level interviews electronically before candidates are brought in for physical assessment; video teleconference can be adopted this will reduce cost of physical travel expenses and risk associated with travelling; social media and technology play a vital role in modern recruitment; hence, it positives can be adopted in recruitment process; improved disclosure and data protection; there should be more background check even during and after recruitment to ensure credibility and prevent impersonation or cheating by the candidates. The government should also improve generally on infrastructure such as electricity and internet bandwidth that technology depends on as the absence of this is sometimes a source of frustration to the firms and candidates.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

The study aims to examine the firm perspective in the recruitment process, what they look forward to in their selection and recruitment processes. Overall, firms have high expectations from candidates seeking to fill vacant positions at various points in time. It was found out in this study that firms can leverage on salary, brand name, referral, job security as core factors in attracting and recruiting quality talents. Digitisation is regarded as a key ingredient in attracting and recruiting quality talents. Techniques such as the use of social media, traditional media, online interview, physical interview have proven to help in selecting quality talents. Evidently, the study found relationship between the network theory which gives an overview of the interactions within an organisation and the views of the respondent. Many human resources manager leverage on relationship with colleagues and social networks in the bid to attract quality talents. Findings also aligned with the equity theory, fairness to employee, employee compensation, etc., are key in attracting and retaining quality talents.

It is recommended that organisations are encouraged to invest more in technology and digitalisation so they can leverage more on information technology and the social media platforms to aid in attracting quality talents, and adequate background checks should be done on candidates to curb falsification of certificates and identity. Staff and management involved in recruitment should be trained in how to manage remote interviews and engage with candidates appropriately. The organisation interfaces via social media should be enhance and populated with information that will attract the right kind of candidates. In addition, video teleconference can be adopted; there should be eradication of age restrictions on vacancies. Online assessment can be done to ease stress on the candidates and save time in filling vacancies. Furthermore, the labour laws should be reviewed to support electronic recruitment, remote working and electronic documentations of employees and contract enforcement. Greater transparency in wage and benefit information dissemination should encourage to reduce exploitation of employees at all levels.

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