Just How Extensive is the Practice of Strategic Recruitment and Selection?

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INTRODUCTION

The integration between the management of human resources and organisation strategy is arguably the prime factor delineating HRM theory and practice from its more traditional personnel management origins. To achieve this strategic integration it is anticipated that each of the bundle of activities making up HRM, as practiced by organisations, will be similarly integrated, vertically, to align with their strategic imperatives. Recruitment and selection has long been recognised as a key activity within HR and this paper seeks to explore the extent to which its practice provides evidence of such strategic alignment.

Prior to the more recent emphasis on strategic alignment, organisational recruitment and selection practice remained relatively unchanged, having evolved into a relatively standardised approach frequently labelled as 'traditional' (Storey and Wright, 2001). This traditional approach has its roots in a psychometric model (Newell and Rice, 1999) where organisational effort is directed at defining the sort of person who will perform a particular job effectively and assessing applicants against defined personal attributes in order to establish a person/job fit. More recently, evidence has pointed to significant developments in recruitment and selection processes particularly in terms of their central focus and sophistication. At one level it is argued that the focus of recruitment and selection has become more strategically driven (Sparrow and Pettigrew, 1988), where a premium is placed on selecting employees against organisational rather than job-specific criteria (Bowen et al., 1991). At another level it is argued that this strategic orientation has required the use of more sophisticated selection techniques and greater involvement of line managers in the process (Storey, 1992; Wilkinson and van Zwanenberg, 1994). Many of these developments have been encapsulated in a strategic variant of recruitment and selection which has been portrayed as the natural adaptation of more traditional approaches to provide greater integration between employee resourcing and business strategy (Thornhill et al., 2000).

An underpinning rationale for the emergence of strategic recruitment and

selection (SR&S) can be developed from two interrelated strands in recent management thinking: strategic management and human resource management (HRM). The starting point is that organisations have arguably become more strategic in their behaviour in pursuit of competitive advantage in an increasingly turbulent business environment (Porter, 1985). Strategic behaviour involves an organisation in matching its resources over the long-run to the demands of its changing environment (Johnson and Scholes, 1999). A key element of an organisation's resource capability is its workforce. This receives greater emphasis through HRM which identifies people as the key resource: an organisation's most valuable asset and major source of competitive advantage (Kerfoot and Knights, 1992; Poole and Mansfield, 1992; Sisson, 1994a; Storey, 1995a; Bratton and Gold, 1999). Recruitment and selection is just one element of an array of human resourcing practices that need to be integrated into a coherent bundle by organisations in order to support the delivery of corporate strategy. For some, recruitment and selection lies at the very centre of human resourcing in organisations (Newell and Rice, 1999) where appointment decisions represent some of the most crucial ever taken by employers (IRS, 1991).

If accepted, this proposition presents a logical and persuasive argument for the development of strategically driven recruitment and selection by organisations. This would lead to the expectation that the practice of SR&S would be widely and increasingly evident. However, evidence of SR&S presents a contradictory picture that challenges this optimistic outlook. For example, Storey's (1992) findings that selection as a key, integrated task was evident in 80 per cent of the case companies investigated provides grounds for optimism. Conversely Wright and Storey's (1997) conclusion that despite a few reported exceptions traditional approaches to recruitment and selection continue to dominate practice presents an altogether more pessimistic picture. These apparent contradictions inevitably place a question mark over the extent to which SR&S is really practiced by organisations.

The study reported on here attempts to resolve this conundrum. Its principal aim is to analyse organisational recruitment and selection practice in order to establish whether at the beginning of the new millennium the outlook for the strategic variant should be viewed optimistically or pessimistically. To put it more colloquially it sets out to answer the question: "Is the strategic recruitment and selection glass half full or half empty?" The study represents the first stage of a three-stage investigation, using multiple methods of data collection, from which initial conclusions will be drawn. This first stage explores how practitioners, both line managers and personnel specialists, perceive the recruitment and selection process. These perceptions are analysed against a conceptual framework of SR&S to extract evidence of its practice by organisations.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The Extent of SR&S Practice: Initial Observations

On both sides of the Atlantic there have been a number of reported cases of SR&S in action. This evidence has sometimes been assembled against generic

strategies of competitive advantage. This is well illustrated by two seminal studies reported on by Miles and Snow (1984) and Schuler and Jackson (1987). They were able to identify human resource (HR) practices, including recruitment and selection, which were congruent with the different competitive strategies of defender, prospector and analyser (Miles and Snow, 1984), and cost reduction, innovation and quality enhancement (Schuler and Jackson, 1987), and found evidence of such practice in case companies.

At other times, evidence of SR&S has emerged from studies investigating general developments in HR practice. For example, from a comprehensive study investigating how the management of HR was developing in UK companies, Storey (1992) was able to identify 'selection' as one of twenty-seven dimensions that could be used to differentiate HRM from more traditional personnel management and industrial relations practice. Under HRM, selection was identified as an 'Integrated, key task', whereas under the personnel and industrial relations banner it was seen as a 'Separate, marginal task' (Storey, 1992: 35). In his analysis of fifteen major case companies, Storey (1992: 83) found evidence of integrated selection in 80 per cent of them, suggesting a high incidence of SR&S.

Another strand in case-study-based research has been to examine how human resourcing has supported particular corporate strategies and/or responded to environmental pressures to maintain leading edge competitive positions. Sparrow and Pettigrew (1988), through a study of companies operating in the UK computer industry, tracked how HRM was responding to support radical strategic change flowing from a turbulent business environment. Strategic selection was identified as a critical lever for acquiring specialist skills necessary to support the delivery of high quality service provision as companies moved progressively from concentration on selling hardware to providing total business solutions that incorporated non-hardware support services. In a review of their own case study research, Hendry, Pettigrew and Sparrow (1988) identified that strategic responses to changes in the business environment, such as restructuring, internationalisation and total quality management, were leading to demands for new employee skills to support such moves. Their delivery required a more strategic approach to recruitment and selection. Kydd and Oppenheim (1990) studied four successful industry leaders with excellent track records of HRM practice and found that they were using recruitment and selection strategically to respond, albeit in different ways, to their particular labour market conditions to maintain their competitive position.

Elsewhere, case studies targeted specifically at recruitment and selection have also provided evidence that the strategic variant is being practised. In a study of Chase Manhattan Bank, Borucki and Lafley (1984) demonstrated how recruitment and selection practices were adapted over time to meet different strategic imperatives as they emerged. Research by Bowen et al. (1991: 35) led them to develop an alternative model of recruitment and selection with a strategic thrust based on "Hiring for the organization and not the job" and illustrated how it was used by a manufacturing company to recruit employees

into "its high-involvement organization". In a detailed case study exploring the HR practices of a paper production plant, Beaumont and Hunter (1992) uncovered strong evidence that recruitment and selection was being used strategically to bring about a more flexible workforce that was necessitated by the organisation's competitive strategy.

Although the evidence, based on these cases, of SR&S being practiced is significant, there is equally a substantial literature base that raises doubts about how widespread this practice might be. For example, the conclusions of Lundy and Cowling (1996) and Scholarios and Lockyer (1996) point to recruitment and selection being conducted in a much less strategic and sophisticated way.

There are also a number of concerns about the methodologies employed from which evidence of SR&S has been deduced. Reported cases of SR&S are drawn predominantly from atypical organisations that can be viewed as: leading (Storey, 1992) or excellent (Kydd and Oppenheim, 1990); operating in exceptionally volatile market conditions (Sparrow and Pettigrew, 1988); the largest (Scholarios and Lockyer, 1996); foreign owned, inward investment companies, as exemplified by Nissan (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992); and those experiencing transformational change (van de Vliet, 1995). The validity of case study findings may also be questionable. It is possible that greater investment in recruitment and selection is being incorrectly interpreted as a strategic approach when it represents no more than the rational response to changing labour market conditions that constitute the normal diet of everyday, traditional recruitment and selection practice.

Finally, there may be some confusion at the conceptual level as to what constitutes SR&S. Is SR&S simply about "careful" selection as suggested by Borucki and Lafley (1984: 69) or does the term "strategic" incorporate a wider range of environmental and stakeholder influences as argued by Lundy and Cowling (1996). Clearly, evidence of SR&S claimed by researchers will be a function of their particular conceptual leanings. What is imperative, however, is that any study intending to search for evidence of the strategic variant must make clear how the concept is being interpreted in order that the strategic credentials of organisational recruitment and selection practice can be established. The next section develops the conceptual framework of SR&S used in this study to evaluate organisational practice.

Strategic Recruitment and Selection: A Conceptual Framework

Here it is argued that for recruitment and selection to be classified as strategic it must exhibit three interdependent primary features: strategic integration; a long-term focus; and a mechanism for translating strategic demands into an appropriate recruitment and selection specification. Strategic integration envisages recruitment and selection as a powerful organisational mechanism for aligning the behaviour of employees with its corporate strategy (Sparrow and Hiltrop, 1994). For Iles and Salaman (1995: 207) recruitment and selection represents one of four key HRM levers "necessary to support organisational strategies". From this perspective, SR&S occurs when practice is aligned with

and integrated into the strategic planning process of organisations and involves the translation of mission statements and/or strategic plans into those employee attributes which are seen to be critical to their successful attainment.

This perspective represents a long-term focus where the intention is to develop recruitment and selection practice to source an organisation with those HR attributes deemed critical to its future and long-term success. For Miller (1984: 68) the objective of strategic "staffing" is to identify and choose those "people who will best run the organisation and its business in the long run". To do this, however, involves a capacity to forecast those HR requirements necessary to ensure the successful implementation of an organisation's strategic plans and to develop a range of staffing programmes and activities to find such people. The translation of corporate plans into HR requirements, and the plans to deliver those requirements, requires a bridging mechanism which Rothwell (1995) argues is the province of formalised human resource planning (HRP) and Miller (1984) argues is central to how specialist human resource functions manage their involvement in the staffing process.
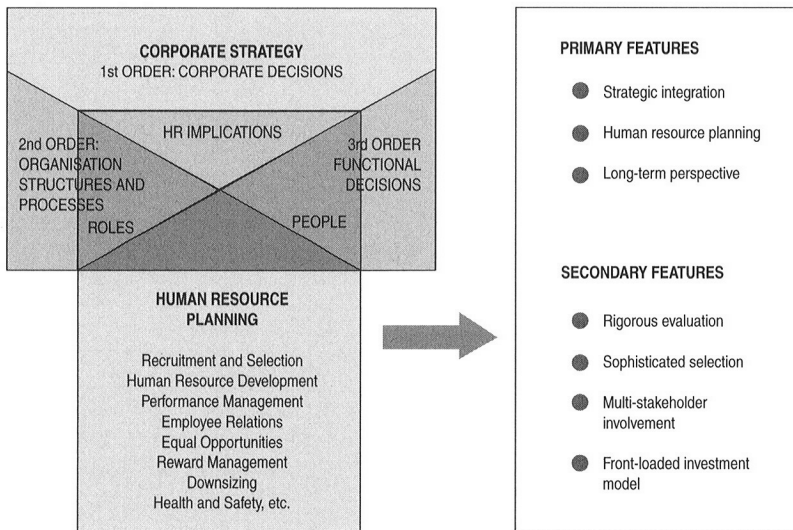
However, it is legitimate to ask whether these primary features present a sufficient explanation of SR&S. It is argued here that when recruitment and selection is strategically driven, thereby satisfying the three primary features, there are two consequential, interdependent outcomes. First, recruitment and selection acquires greater organisational importance and, second, it becomes more sophisticated and complex. When getting it right is measured against broader concerns to facilitate long-run organisational success (Miller, 1984; Sparrow and Hiltrop, 1994; Iles and Salaman, 1995), the recruitment and selection process will arguably assume greater importance than where it simply relates to recruiting against the more parochial concerns of immediate job needs. In turn, the demands generated by strategic approaches are likely to lead to more diverse and exacting personnel specifications which will require a greater array of recruitment and selection practices to be deployed if organisational staffing needs are to be met. In extremis, for example, recruitment and selection may need to deliver "against a composite personnel specification embracing specific job requirements, group fit and organisation fit for both now and in the future" (Thornhill et al., 2000: 115).

These consequential outcomes of strategically driven recruitment and selection have the potential to impact significantly on organisational practice in a number of particular ways. First, the perceived critical role of recruitment and selection and concern to get it right is likely to lead to a front-loaded investment model. Adherents to this model would regard the expenditure of effort and cost to ensure effective recruitment and selection as preferable to incurring (end-loaded) costs associated with managing poor performers recruited as a result of inadequate investment in the process. Second, the greater financial expenditure demanded by a front-loaded investment model will almost certainly lead to concerted calls for its effectiveness to be rigorously evaluated, including the contribution recruitment and selection makes to the attainment of strategic objectives (Lawler, 1994). Third, heavy investment in the process, the

consequential emphasis on getting 'it' right and the demands of a more complex and diverse person specification will necessitate the use of a greater array of selection methods to assess potential recruits (Evenden, 1993; Bratton and Gold, 1999) in order to deliver acceptable levels of reliability and validity. Fourth, the complex and critical nature of SR&S makes untenable the limited stakeholder involvement associated with the traditional variant and arguably demands a multi-stakeholder approach. At one level, this pays due respect to recruitment and selection as a two-way process (Herriot et al., 1997) that is sensitive to its impact on candidates (Iles and Robertson, 1997) and supports their participation by providing sufficient information on the vacancy and its context to enable them to make their own informed self-selection decisions (Lawler, 1994). At another level, the move to a multi-stakeholder model recognises that the intricacies and uncertainties surrounding strategically directed recruitment and selection are seen to be best served by the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

The position adopted here is that these attributes represent secondary features and are not sufficient on their own to evidence SR&S. This requires, in addition, the presence of the three primary features which, taken together with the secondary features, can be depicted as an explanatory framework of SR&S practice as depicted in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1 Strategic Recruitment and Selection: An Explanatory Framework

CORPORATE STRATEGY
1st ORDER: CORPORATE DECISIONS

HR IMPLICATIONS

2nd ORDER: ORGANISATION STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

3rd ORDER FUNCTIONAL DECISIONS

ROLES   PEOPLE

HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

Recruitment and Selection
Human Resource Development
Performance Management
Employee Relations
Equal Opportunities
Reward Management
Downsizing
Health and Safety, etc.

PRIMARY FEATURES

- Strategic integration
- Human resource planning
- Long-term perspective

SECONDARY FEATURES

- Rigorous evaluation
- Sophisticated selection
- Multi-stakeholder involvement
- Front-loaded investment model

METHODOLOGY

This paper reports on the first part of a three-stage investigation that aims to address the contradictory evidence surrounding the incidence of SR&S practice by answering the question: "Just how extensive is the practice of strategic

recruitment and selection practice?" (or "Is the strategic recruitment and selection glass half full or half empty?")

The first stage, reported on here, focuses on participants' perceptions of the overall recruitment and selection process used by their organisations as depicted by flow charts they have constructed to map the process. The second stage will involve a content analysis of the job description and person specification documentation used to underpin recruitment and selection and company recruitment and selection manuals. The final stage will return to a focus on participant perceptions through the use of semi-structured interviews to explore, in depth, the extent of and reasons behind the incidence of SR&S or the lack of it.

To date, data have been collected over a four-year period (1997–2001) in support of the first two stages of the investigation. This has utilised a non-directed, self-reporting mechanism whereby respondents were required to construct a flow chart that depicted the actual recruitment and selection process that was followed by their organisation to fill a recent vacancy according to their perception of events. Instructions for this activity emphasised that they should select a recruitment exercise that they had been involved in personally and that the flow chart should start from the *very beginning* of the process and work through to the *very end*. In addition respondents were required to retrieve and append the job description and person specification documentation relating to the recruitment and selection exercise depicted in their flow chart. Table 6.1 provides a summary of the data collected:

Table 6.1 Summary of Data Collected

Students	Flow chart only	Flow chart + JD only	Flow chart + PS only	Full sets	Addit-ional JD + PS sets	Addit-ional JD only	Total flow charts	Total JDs	Total PSs
Management	42	12	2	41	3	0	97	56	46
Personnel	17	5	0	61	48	4	83	118	109
Total	59	17	2	102	51	4	180	174	155*

* *Of the 155 person specifications (PS), 72 were embedded in the job description (JD).*

All respondents were studying human resourcing modules as part of either a postgraduate professional personnel or management programme and data were generated as part of their study preparation for the topic of recruitment and selection. Prior to producing their data students were exposed to other course inputs and preparatory activities. For management students this covered HRM, recruitment and selection, and HRP. For personnel students this covered strategic integration, HRP and recruitment and selection.

The organisations captured by the investigation were simply the employers

(or sponsors) of respondents. The sample of organisations and the roles of respondents was therefore preoscribed. However, the number of respondents and the nature of their employment ensured a rich diversity within the sample. In collecting data, company anonymity was guaranteed but the 108 organisations represented reflected great diversity in terms of industrial sector, nature of the business and size. By way of example, organisations were drawn from: building and construction; charitable trusts; education; financial services; food production; health authorities and medicine; information technology; local government; manufacturing; professional bodies; professional consultants and services; publishing; research establishments; retailing; sport and leisure; and utilities. Of the 180 respondents 97 (54 per cent) were studying for postgraduate management qualifications and 83 (46 per cent) for professional membership of CIPD. Respondents' jobs varied widely in terms of occupation and position within the organisational hierarchy as illustrated by the following examples: Branch Manager; Change Manager; Design Engineer; Environmental Health Officer; Manager, Information Services; Occupational Therapist; Office Manager; Quality Assessor; Sales Consultant; Personnel Assistant; Personnel Manager; Personnel Officer; and Training Manager.

One further dimension relating to data collection is worthy of mention. During taught sessions students were formed into groups to share, discuss and analyse their flow charts. This was followed up by a tutor summary based on findings and conclusions reported by the groups and the tutor's overall analysis of the flow charts supplied. At this stage students had the opportunity to comment on the validity of their flow chart submitted and thereby correct any misperceptions.

Although not without their limitations flow charts represent a common way of depicting recruitment and/or selection processes as evidenced by their frequent usage in the HR literature (see for example, Bolton, 1997; Dessler, 1997; Corbridge and Pilbeam, 1998) and by organisations as a prescriptive tool. They can be used to show the individual elements making up the recruitment and selection process, where the process begins and ends and how the elements interrelate with each other. To analyse their strategic credentials flow charts have been evaluated against the schematic representation of SR&S depicted in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Figure 6.2 has taken the primary and secondary features from the framework and developed them into a series of indicators that evidence their presence and identified where they could potentially be reflected in flow charts.

FINDINGS

Reporting of findings has been structured to replicate the sequential development of the primary and secondary features of SR&S as illustrated in Figures 6.1 and 6.2.

Primary Features: Strategic Integration

The strategic variant suggests that the primary feature of strategic integration drives the whole recruitment and selection process, but only one respondent

Figure 6.2 Indicators of Strategic Recruitment and Selection

Features Of Strategic Recruitment & Selection	Indicators Of Strategic Recruitment & Selection	Investigation Stage		
		1 Flow Charts Person Spec.Co. Manuals	2 Job Descrip	3 Inter-views
Primary features:	Strategy represents the start point for R&S.	✔	✔	✔
• Strategic integration	HRP is used to translate strategic imperatives into organisationally driven HR attributes.	✔	✔	✔
• Human resource planning	Needs analysis is informed by strategy and desired HR attributes.	✔	✔	✔
	Person specifications constructed around job, work group and organisation needs.	✘	✔	✔
• Long-term perspective	Person specifications and job descriptions reflect future as well as more immediate organisational/role demands.	✘	✔	✔
Secondary features:	Evaluation of R&S outcomes:			
• Rigorous evaluation	organisation/strategic contribution;	✔	✔	✔
	job performance;	✔	✔	✔
	candidate satisfaction;	✔	✔	✔
	performance against R&S budget.	✔	✔	✔
	Evaluation of R&S processes:			
	planning phase;	✔	✔	✔
	recruitment phase;	✔	✔	✔
	selection phase;	✔	✔	✔
	complete R&S process.	✔	✔	✔
• Sophisticated selection	Use of high reliability/validity methods.	✔	✔	✔
	Selection methods matched to demands of person spec.	✘	✔	✔
	Use of multiple methods.	✔	✔	✔
	Triangulation of their outputs in decision-making.	✘	✔	✔
	Use of structured and behavioural interviews.	✔	✔	✔
	Use of assessment centres.	✔	✔	✔
	Multi-stakeholder involvement in selection methods and decision making.	✘	✔	✔

• Multi-stakeholder involvement	Candidates as equal partners in a two-way process.	✗	✔	✔
	Use of candidate information packs.	✔	✔	✔
	Selection methods include those enabling candidates to asses the organisation.	✔	✔	✔
	Feedback offered to candidates.	✔	✔	✔
	Feedback invited from candidates.	✔	✔	✔
	Use of panel interviews.	✔	✔	✔
	Senior management, peers, subordinates, service providers and recipients involved in R&S process.	✗	✔	✔
• Front-loaded investment model	Tailor-made R&S exercises.	✗	✔	✔
	Multi-stakeholder involvement.	✗	✔	✔
	Adequate resourcing of R&S in terms of time/budget.	✗	✗	✔
	Rigorous evaluation.	✔	✔	✔
	R&S processes responsive to outputs from evaluation.	✗	✗	✔

reported that strategic considerations were the starting point for the process. The flow chart, depicting the recruitment of a Building Control Manager to a District Council, revealed that "restructuring of the entire planning department" interacted with the "revised objectives" of "efficiency and customer service" to drive the remainder of the recruitment and selection process. What was not made clear was the level at which these strategic considerations were initiated. Here it is assumed that changes to over-arching corporate strategy were driving strategic change at the departmental level. It is of course possible that the department was acting independently and forging its own strategic direction in which case strategy formulation was operating at the functional rather than the corporate level (Purcell, 1989).

In three further cases corporate strategy appeared as one of a number of factors which were informing the need analysis stage of the recruitment and selection process. For example, in one instance the stage "Determine need to refill?" was informed by "Previous roles/post holders; realignment of duties/reporting; *organisation strategy*". In another, "Job analysis" was conducted around a number of "policies (*corporate*, staffing, legal, grading)".

In total, then, only four flow charts (2 per cent) made any explicit reference to corporate strategy. However, because corporate strategy lies at the heart of HRP, it is possible that some respondents regard the two as synonymous, where reference to the latter provides proxy evidence of the former.

Primary Features: Human Resource Planning
Within the conceptual framework, HRP was interpreted as the vehicle for translating corporate plans into staffing requirements and, as such, its role within

the recruitment and selection process may be more transparent than that of corporate strategy. It was certainly more evident in the flow charts, where 10 respondents (6 per cent), none of whom had mentioned corporate strategy, incorporated HRP as an element in their flow chart. In 6 of these (3 per cent), respondents referred to HRP explicitly as the generator of the need to recruit. In the other cases the reference was more tangential but has been interpreted here as representing HRP. For example, one respondent referred to "High level plan identifies needs" whereas another simply referred to "Headcount analysis".

Table 6.2 summarises the extent to which these primary features were found to be informing an organisation's analysis of its recruitment and selection requirements and initiating the whole process. Taken together only 14 respondents (8 per cent) made any reference to either strategic planning or HRP, and this interpretation was arguably generous in 50 per cent of these cases. These primary features represented the starting point of the recruitment and selection process in only 10 flow charts (6 per cent). Conversely, the overwhelming majority of flow charts commenced with the release or notification of a vacancy (62 per cent). This was normally expressed in terms such as "vacancy", "vacancy arises" or "notification of vacancy" (36 per cent).

Table 6.2 Inputs Used by Organisations to Analyse their Recruitment and Selection Requirements
(no. of respondents = flow chart entries)

Analysing Organisational Requirements	No. of respondents n=180	%	Starting point of R&S process	%
Strategic planning	4	2	1	1
Human resource planning (HRP)	10	6	9	5
Needs analysis	43	24	25	14
HRP and/or needs analysis	51	28	34	19
Analysing Job Requirements				
Job analysis	28	16	14	8
Needs analysis	43	24	25	14
Job analysis and/or needs analysis	61	34	39	22
Job description	168	93	N/a	N/a
Person specification	145	81	N/a	N/a

Another cluster of flow charts commenced further into the traditional recruitment and selection process at a point around which the vacancy was advertised (8 per cent). In one case the starting point was the receipt of an unsolicited application and in another a response to the job advertisement itself. Taken together with the previous category (vacancy release) it would appear that in some 70 per cent of cases it is the vacant position that initiates the recruitment and selection process without any prior strategic planning, HRP or definition of need.

In total 61 respondents (34 per cent) incorporated analysis of need and/or job analysis into their flow chart and where some type of need analysis was indicated it appeared to be predominantly associated with identifying the requirements of the immediate vacancy. It is, of course, possible that in some of these cases, needs analysis was shaped by wider, corporate-level planning. However, in only two cases was there reference to such planning. In one, job analysis was informed by organisation "policies (corporate, staffing, legal, grading)", whilst in the other, "headcount analysis" was used to determine the existence and nature of the vacancy.

Primary Features: Long-term Perspective

The final primary feature identified against SR&S was its long-term focus. The self-reporting mechanism adopted did not allow this feature to be specifically analysed. However, the foregoing analysis would suggest that the focus is predominantly short term with the emphasis on meeting the immediate needs of a vacancy at a highly localised level. There was very little evidence of strategic planning or HRP and little overt evidence that any needs analysis was being driven by corporate concerns. Indeed, overall the flow charts are very reminiscent of those found in standard HR texts depicting the traditional variant of recruitment and selection. This position is reinforced by findings related to the secondary features of SR&S that follow.

Secondary Features: Rigorous Evaluation

The analytical framework developed to capture the flow-chart data covered various types of evaluation, which could be broadly classified as relating to either outcomes of the recruitment and selection process or elements of the process itself. Table 6.3 summarises the position and what will be immediately apparent is the limited extent of any reported evaluation. Only 16 respondents (9 per cent) appeared to be conducting any form of evaluation and in no case was the strategic contribution of recruitment and selection evaluated. In terms of outcomes, evaluation was concentrated around a review of job performance following appointment (5 per cent of respondents) and, for process evaluation, was directed at recruitment methods (2 per cent), selection methods (1 per cent) or the whole process (3 per cent).

Secondary Features: Sophisticated Selection

At one level the use of more sophisticated approaches to selection anticipates the use of highly reliable and valid selection methods. At another it suggests the use of a wider diversity of methods in order to assess candidates against the more demanding person specifications produced by strategically driven recruitment and selection practice. Findings, however, suggest that selection methods are rarely evaluated to assess their reliability and validity (see Table 6.3) and that, as summarised in Table 6.4, reliance on the classic trio of short listing, interviewing and references (Cook, 1998) still predominates selection practice. Virtually all respondents indicated that their organisations used interviewing (99 per cent)

Table 6.3 Evaluation of Recruitment and Selection Outcomes and Processes
(no. of respondents = flow chart entries)

	No. of respondents* n=180	%
Post-Selection Evaluation of R&S Outcomes		
Candidate satisfaction	1	1
Review of candidate job performance post-appointment	9	5
Organisational or strategic contribution	0	0
Rejected candidates	0	0
Budget review	2	1
Total conducting some evaluation of R&S outcomes	12	7
Post-Selection Evaluation of R&S Processes		
Planning phase	0	0
Recruitment methods	3	2
Selection methods	2	1
R & S process	5	3
Total conducting some evaluation of R&S processes	9	5
Total Conducting Some Evaluation (including the 2 budget reviews)	16	9

*Figures do not necessarily total because of multiple responses.

and short–listing (92 per cent) methods to select staff, with almost half indicating the use of references (49 per cent). In contrast 41 (23 per cent) used some form of testing and 16 (9 per cent) one or more selection methods from a cluster comprising group exercises, work sampling, presentations or a written task. A further 17 flow charts (9 per cent) indicated the use of assessment centres which would obviously incorporate an array of these selection methods. In total, 33 per cent of flow charts depicted the use of assessment centres and/or psychometric/personality testing and/or group exercises, work sampling etc. To put it another way, in two-thirds of reported cases selection did not progress beyond the use of the classic trio.

Table 6.4 Selection Methods Identified by Respondents
(no. of respondents = flow chart entries)

Selection methods	No. of respondents n=180	%
Short listing		
By application form/CV	152	84
By interview	23	13
By testing	5	3
Total using one or more method of short listing	165	92
Nil response	15	8
Interviewing		
Simply stated "interview"	66	37
1 to 1	25	14
2 to 1	24	13

Panel	33	18
Sequential	44	24
Total using interviews[a]	**174** (n=176)	99
Testing		
Psychometric	23	13
Personality	7	4
Ability/attainment	12	7
Other/not specified	10	6
Assessment centres	17	9
Total using one or more types of testing	41	23
Total testing and/or using assessment centres	58	32
References		
Prior to selection	16	9
Post-selection: pre-offer	18	10
Post-offer	55	31
Total using references[b]	**88**	49
Other selection methods		
Group exercise	4	2
Work sampling	4	2
Presentations	8	4
Written task	1	1
Total using one or more of the above methods	16	9
Medical	25	14

a *Excluding two respondents using 'internal selection' and two where selection methods were not stated.*
b *One respondent indicated two categories.*

Secondary Features: Multi–Stakeholder Involvement

Within the strategic framework multi-stakeholder involvement pointed to due weighting being given to the interests of potential applicants and candidates in a genuine two-way process as well as the active involvement in the recruitment and selection process of other stakeholders significantly affected by its outcomes. The method of data collection is not particularly suited to the extraction of detailed information on stakeholder involvement in the recruitment and selection process. In retrospect, it would have been useful to ask respondents to assign responsibilities to the elements depicted in their flow charts, although some respondents provided this data voluntarily. Where this occurred, it pointed to three participating groups: senior management involvement in vacancy authorisation; and HR practitioner and line management involvement in recruitment and selection activities to varying degrees of responsibility. In addition, flow charts pointed to the use of panel interviews (18 per cent) where more extensive stakeholder involvement might be expected. Elsewhere, the flow

charts suggest limited concern for the needs of potential applicants and candidates. Only 23 respondents (13 per cent) indicated that information packs were sent to those making enquiries at the recruitment stage and only 13 (7 per cent) that feedback was provided to unsuccessful candidates, which, in some cases, was restricted to internal candidates alone. In only one instance did evaluation of the recruitment and selection process involve obtaining the views of candidates. Discounting the two-way dialogue typifying interviews, selection appeared to be predominantly a one-way process. Clearly, selection methods employed in assessment centres and the use of work sampling (11 per cent) may provide the candidate with insights into the job and its organisational context. However, only 4 per cent of charts indicated the use of any candidate-driven selection methods. In the majority of cases, this involved spending time in the working environment and meeting team members. Taken together, the nature of what should ostensibly be seen as a two-way process (Popovich and Wanous, 1982) appears a long way distant from the development of realistic job previews championed by writers such as Lawler (1994) and candidate-friendly recruitment and selection procedures (Fletcher, 1991; Iles and Robertson, 1997).

Secondary Features: Front-Loaded Investment Model

Findings here can only be deduced from the data provided but the overall lack of strategic or HR planning, general reliance on the classic trio of selection methods, essentially one-way nature of the process and absence of process or outcome evaluation would not suggest that the front-loaded investment model is much in evidence. Consistent with this observation was the evident lack of effort devoted to the analysis of recruitment and selection needs. This was reinforced by the fact that 19 per cent of flow charts did not incorporate a person specification element and that prior planning was seldom in evidence for either recruitment (17 per cent) or selection (14 per cent).

DISCUSSION

Based on the above-findings, if self-reporting of recruitment and selection practice is set against the strategic framework, developed in Figures 6.1 and 6.2, there is very little evidence of the strategic variant in operation. If evidence of strategic fit is both a necessary and sufficient criterion for SR&S then reported findings suggest it was only evident in 2 per cent of the recruitment and selection exercises surveyed. If it is held that the three primary features of strategic fit, strategic recruitment planning and long-term focus must be demonstrated to evidence SR&S then no recruitment and selection exercise (or company) meets all these conditions. If HRP is generously interpreted as a proxy measure of these primary features, because strategic fit and a longer-term focus are implicit, then a further 6 per cent of recruitment and selection exercises could be said to reflect SR&S. Taken together it could then be argued, perhaps very generously, that 8 per cent of recruitment and selection exercises are being strategically driven. If the secondary features are incorporated into the template then, again, no exercise satisfies all identified SR&S criteria, although all four secondary features are far

more evident in those cases incorporating strategic or HR planning than in the population as a whole. Although drawn from a small sample, some evidence of the front-loaded investment model can be found in all those charts incorporating strategic or HR planning into the recruitment and selection process (100 per cent), compared to 57 per cent for the population as a whole. Similarly, for the remaining secondary features of evaluation, sophisticated selection and multi-stakeholder involvement the comparative figures are 36 per cent (9 per cent), 43 per cent (33 per cent) and 43 per cent (23 per cent). On the basis of this evidence, the SR&S glass is virtually empty, albeit with a little froth in the bottom.

In seeking an explanation for the very low incidence of SR&S reported in the flow charts, it is possible to advance a number of arguments. First, it might be argued that whilst not explicit, strategic integration may be implicit in certain facets of recruitment and selection illustrated in the charts, as intimated earlier. However, such a notion is highly questionable as it runs counter to one of the central tenets of strategic integration. Any idea that strategic integration permeates recruitment and selection activity through some kind of osmosis contradicts the idea that strategic fit is central to HRM and has to be actively pursued with the involvement of all employees (Guest, 1987; Mabey and Salaman, 1995).

Second, another potential challenge to the efficacy of reported findings arises over ambiguity in the conceptual framework of SR&S itself. Although a wider and more demanding construction of SR&S consistent with the views of Lundy and Cowling (1996) has been utilised, narrower definitions have their advocates (Borucki and Lafley, 1984). It is possible to delineate at least three levels of interpretation against which flow-chart data can be analysed for evidence of SR&S: the first is where strategic integration alone is accepted as a necessary and sufficient condition to evidence SR&S; the second is where HRP and a long-term focus, although possibly regarded as implicit within strategic planning, are explicitly added to give the three primary features identified earlier; the third is where a set of secondary features can be added to provide the construction of SR&S adopted here. It might be anticipated that the incidence of SR&S will increase the narrower the definition becomes, such that the choice of a more demanding set of criteria here would inevitably depress evidence of its manifestation. However, the data clearly do not support this argument because it can be demonstrated from the findings that irrespective of which interpretation is applied there is minimal evidence of SR&S being practiced.

Third, it might be argued that the practice of SR&S is limited by its selective application by organisations to certain positions only. This would be consistent, for example, with Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm construct, where it is possible to argue that strategic integration may find expression in the recruitment and selection of core but not peripheral workers. However, apart from again running counter to the principles of strategic integration, an analysis of the data by occupation revealed little variation in the recruitment and selection practices applied to the different groupings of senior managers (7 per cent of the total job population), line managers and supervisors (23 per cent), professional and

technical (29 per cent), administration and clerical (38 per cent) and manual employees (3 per cent).

In contrast, it is possible to advance arguments suggesting that evidence of SR&S found in the flow charts is exaggerated. First, the self-reporting method of data collection could conceivably have biased respondents who, when constructing their flow charts, were primed to start at the "very beginning" and work through to the "very end". This emphasis could have led to greater reflection on the two ends of the recruitment and selection spectrum and possibly increased the probability of respondents identifying the elements of strategic planning, HRP and evaluation. It is difficult to imagine this emphasis reduced to likelihood of their identification! This is particularly so bearing in mind that respondents had been sensitised to key elements of the SR&S template before producing their data set. Prior to the production of flow charts respondents had been variously exposed to strategic integration, HRM, HRP and recruitment and selection on their postgraduate study programmes.

Second, it may be recalled that the flow charts produced by respondents were also used as teaching material. Small groups would compare and contrast their flow diagrams and draw conclusions about the messages communicated in terms of actual recruitment and selection practice. In addition, the tutor provided a summary analysis based on a brief review of data supplied by the whole group. This invariably highlighted the lack of strategic integration and HRP, almost non-existent process or outcome evaluation and limited use of sophisticated selection techniques. Close parallels were always drawn to the similarities between the traditional recruitment and selection model and the processes as depicted by respondents' flow charts. As was explained earlier, at this point respondents had the opportunity to comment on the validity of the tutor's analysis. This frequently highlighted omissions in reporting where the most common oversights related to the use of medicals, references and testing but never to strategic planning, HRP or evaluation.

Notwithstanding these arguments, the findings would be far more robust if derived from multiple methods of data collection which, as detailed earlier, has been incorporated into the overall research design. An important dimension of this will be to gain an understanding as to why there appears to be such a mismatch between what is actually happening at ground level and what we might expect if the logic of SR&S advanced earlier is accepted. Now it is only possible to speculate on the reasons for the mismatch, although some likely contenders spring to mind. First, there may be issues around the role of managers, how they are constructed by organisations and perceived by incumbents. Particularly important here may be the low priority afforded to human resourcing that is frequently associated with managerial behaviour (Snape et al., 1993; Beer and Eisenstat, 1996).

Second is the context within which managers operate. SR&S involves a long-term perspective which may not chime with the day-to-day experiences of managers who are under pressure to achieve short-term results. The short-term focus of UK organisations is well documented (Storey and Sisson, 1993) and is

often reinforced by prevailing organisational human resourcing practice. Where managers are appraised and rewarded against short-term performance objectives they are hardly likely to look beyond their immediate and parochial concerns (Storey and Sisson, 1993). It is also possible that a manager's ability to think strategically is constrained by the organisation's failure to communicate effectively its strategic imperatives.

Third, it is possible that management competence rather than organisational context lies at the heart of the problem. At a general level there has long been disquiet about the education and training base of UK managers (Ashton and Felstead, 1995). More specifically, managers have been criticised for their lack of proficiency in the soft-skill areas associated with their human resourcing responsibilities (Garavan, 1991; Beer and Eisenstat, 1996) and it is questionable as to how much training and support managers receive in this area once appointed. With direct reference to their recruitment and selection responsibilities it would be interesting to establish what training they had received for this critical role and explore the extent to which any training equips them to practice the strategic variant. Another dimension of competence is the recruitment and selection of managers themselves. Of particular importance might be the extent to which their recruitment was strategically driven!

Fourth, it is equally legitimate to raise the same question marks over the role and competence of HR practitioners involved in the recruitment and selection process and the context within which they perform their role. For example, applying Storey's (1992) model of HR practice would suggest that a strategic approach is more likely where the role is that of a 'changemaker' compared to say that of a 'handmaiden'. Further, the ability of HR practitioners to influence recruitment and selection practice will be directly affected by their organisational credibility, knowledge and competence. The survey results reported above do not provide grounds for optimism.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the conceptual logic of strategically based recruitment and selection and the clear business case advanced for its practice, the preceding analysis leads to the inescapable conclusion that in reality it is virtually non-existent in the companies surveyed. The evidence presented above firmly supports those who argue that there is a shortage of cases demonstrating strategic selection in action (Lundy and Cowling, 1996) and that recruitment and selection practice is dominated by traditional approaches (Wright and Storey, 1997). Irrespective of how generously the data are interpreted, there is simply no convincing evidence that the strategic variant is being rigorously practised across the 108 organisations or 180 recruitment and selection exercises surveyed. At worst, there was no case that satisfied all of the more exacting criteria demanded by the broader definition of SR&S adopted here. Even when evaluated solely against the 'primary features' associated with narrower definitions of the concept, there was not one case that met all of these conditions. At best, there was some limited evidence that primary and/or secondary features of SR&S were reflected in a fragmentary way by

practice in a few cases. The two examples that came closest to the strategic variant occurred in those cases where, respectively, strategic planning and manpower planning were incorporated into the recruitment and selection process and reflected in the person specification (although, interestingly, not the job description) through organisationally driven competencies that in one case at least were clearly derived from the organisation's corporate strategy.

In terms of the initial question "Is the strategic recruitment and selection glass half full of half empty?", the answer is that it is neither but instead is decidedly empty, although arguably with some traces of froth at the bottom. What little, fragmentary evidence there was of strategic practice was concentrated in line management and supervisory appointments and accounted for the majority of strategic features found. Therefore, even where features of strategic practice are evident it is largely restricted to narrow job clusters which runs counter to the principles of strategic integration on which much of strategic management is based. In terms of Storey's (1992: 35) analysis, it would seem that, on the basis of these findings at least, recruitment and selection is very much a 'Separate, marginal task' rather than an 'Integrated, key task'.

It would appear that, not for the first time, rhetoric appears to be running well ahead of reality. These findings, pointing to a paucity of SR&S practice, may prompt speculation about the real extent of strategic management or HRM in organisations. At this rate a more general search for strategically driven HR management practice may be tantamount to drinking at the proverbial pub with no beer!

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