

Recruiting the best: consultancy skills for recruiting specialist roles



Jo Lawrence, Business Development Director at the Occupational Psychology Centre (OPC) shares consultancy work that helps rail operators to identify the best talent for either unique specialist roles or large-scale recruitment programmes



The OPC has been working in the rail industry for 30 years, bringing insights, fair and robust assessment processes and a wide array of assessment tools to both UK and international rail and transport organisations. They are specialists in safety-critical performance and role selection, and

human factors work. They work alongside clients to deliver successful and cost-effective talent acquisition solutions that are unique and tailored to rail and transport organisation's needs.

Over the years the OPC has supported high volume recruitment programmes for many generic, standard safety-critical

roles, such as Train Drivers, Conductors, and/or Shunters etc. Some of these high-volume campaigns can involve recruiting from a global applicant pool. However, the OPC is increasingly being asked to assist in the development and delivery of bespoke selection for some very unique, specialist roles. These might include roles that are

recruited less frequently e.g., part time Tram Drivers, Heritage rail roles or one-off high-level appointments such as Directors, or Operational Standards Managers etc

So, what are some of the important factors to consider for each of these types of recruitment?

Large scale recruitment drives

In the OPC's experience, some important factors that can be considered are:

- Fair international recruitment standards.
- Setting realistic selection standards.
- Determining the pool.
- Maximising the candidate experience.

Fair international recruitment standards

Achieving commonality across geographical regions can be a challenge. For example, some operators may run large scale recruitment programmes for Train Drivers as an example, where they will advertise and look to recruit experienced drivers from a global talent pool. The challenge can be assembling a common recruitment standard for a fair comparison of all candidates. This is important when candidates may have been recruited using different operational standards in their own locality.

Setting realistic selection standards

When recruiting from a global talent pool, it's important that applicant screening allows quality candidates to get through each stage. However, crucially this needs to be balanced with a recruiter's safety-critical performance standards still being met and maintained. The aim is always to recruit the very best, bearing in mind that some applicants may have been selected using differing standards elsewhere. Ensuring a wide and even global applicant pool allows existing drivers to work and flourish in overseas train companies.

Determining the pool

The size, diversity and quality of an applicant pool is an important consideration. This will determine the attraction strategy. The OPC may advise on an attraction strategy that encourages an applicant pool that is as diverse as possible – it is important to ensure breadth across gender, ethnicity, age, social economic status, and sexual orientation as well as encouraging social mobility, etc. This is particularly important for organisations that believe the diversity of their existing employee profile may be too narrow.

Pipeline fill is also important when considering the size of the applicant pool. It's important to ensure there are enough successful candidates through each of the selection stages to deliver a high-quality short list from which to choose the final and best candidates. Ideally the OPC like their clients to be spoilt for choice, rather than them feeling there are only a handful of good candidates to choose from – risking selection decisions 'just to fill' a post.



Maximising the candidate experience

In large scale recruitment drives, it's easy to lose the individuality of candidates. They may feel like just a number; it can be very impersonal with a lengthy process that has little or no results feedback. Often candidates can be left not knowing the outcome, potentially leading to them having a poor perception of the recruiting organisation. If a candidate has invested time and effort in an application, then it's important to provide them with timely and valuable feedback on their progress – whether successful or otherwise. This can be achieved by setting 'time targets' at each stage of the process, for when candidates receive a response. Wherever possible feedback should be personal and bespoke to their performance. This helps them journey through the selection process with confidence. If a candidate is unsuccessful, feedback helps provide advice and guidance for future applications; either for the same or similar roles within that organisation or for a different transport provider.

Recruiting for unique, specialist roles

As the OPC specialises in safety critical performance, clients often approach them for help to recruit some roles that have special skills or unique qualities about them. For example, Operations Standards Managers, or Safety Directors. The OPC will spend a lot of time listening and discussing with a client before landing on the best process. The OPC's aim is to adopt the best process that will help select the best employee who will perform the role to the highest safety standards.

Exploring the requirements of the role

It's really important to explore the requirements of the role, the number to select – whether one or more, timescales for

recruitment and whether there are internal or external opportunities. We need to understand the key characteristics that an excellent employee will need to have in order to do the job to the highest safety standard. Thorough job analysis, observation, questionnaires or interview techniques or reviewing existing role profiles can help uncover the key characteristics of a role.

If the role is unique and new, OPC Psychologists and expert Assessors can pull experience from other organisations and roles they've worked with where there has been a similar function or activity to create an initial job profile. Discussions with the client's managers and other team members can help to inform and refine it further. Once the key competencies are identified, deciding on an assessment tool matrix for the selection process can follow.

Identifying candidate aptitude for a new role with little or no experience of it

What do we do when a role is totally unique or candidates applying have no previous experience or expertise? In this case it is very important to choose the correct set of assessment tools that will assess for potential and aptitude rather than exploring existing experience and expertise. For example, if we are recruiting for Train Driver managers then we could have a talent pool of applicants who know how to drive a train but have no experience of leading a team of drivers, encouraging, nurturing and training them. So, we need a robust set of assessment tools that can identify leadership and managerial potential, even if the individual has never displayed those in their existing role. The same can apply for a post that is new and novel.

Drawing up an assessment tool matrix

Whether or not we are working on a mass

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recruitment process recruiting hundreds of employees to fill a specific role or we are recruiting for one unique appointment, the assessment tool selection process is the same.

We want to pick 'winner' assessment tools that will really tap into the key qualities and personal competencies required for safe and effective performance. Once a clear job profile with key characteristics and personal competencies has been decided upon, the assessment tool matrix can be put together. This will match each of the required personal characteristics, behaviours, and Non-Technical skills (NTS) with corresponding appropriate assessment tools. A matrix may include a range of tools e.g., psychometrics, such as ability tests, personality questionnaires, situational judgement tests (SJT), role plays and/or work sample exercises. So, for example

way in delivering excellent customer experience. They were in start-up mode but were expected to expand their services dramatically over the next few years. Their desire was to recruit and retain the best people who could deliver excellent customer service. They also aspired to 'grow their own' people, promoting from within, for a new senior post of Operations Trainer drawing on a selection pool from frontline roles. OPC Assessment Psychologist, Emily Wong, reviewed the job profile provided and recommended a shortlist of possible online assessment tools that could be used to help select the best Operations Trainer. The opportunity to trial and experience some of the proposed assessment tools online helped inform the rail managers' decisions about what to use.

The following short list of assessment tools were decided on.

by OPC Business Psychologist and bureau expert Rebecca Holmes. She provided results for each candidate and their assessment tool scores, ranking them in an easy-to-use and understand A-D grading system. An OPC Psychologist then talked through the assessment results in detail with the recruiters via a 'Teams' session. The client used and applied the assessment results to help inform their final interviews and enrich their selection decision. The feedback from the client was really positive. From receipt of the client's Operations Trainer role profile, it took just 14 working days to provide the assessment results back to the client.

How much can be achieved remotely in a short timescale despite a difference of 9,000 miles and very different time zones!

Jo Lawrence, Business Development Director at the OPC concluded by saying:

AN ASSESSMENT TOOL MATRIX



Selection Assessment Tool	Skills Assessed
The Rules Acquisition Aptitude Test (RAAT)	Helps identify the ability to understand, reason with and follow written rules, regulations and procedures.
The Customer Service Numerical Test (CSNT)	Assesses the ability to understand and reason with customer service related numerical information.
The Customer Service Situations Test (CSS)	A situational judgement exercise that helps to identifying the potential to deliver excellent customer service.
The Core Abstract Reasoning Test (CoreA)	Assesses general intellectual ability and the ability to reason with abstract information to find solutions.
The Railway Situational Judgement Test (RSJT)	Helps determine the potential to follow rules, undertake key checks and demonstrate safety awareness in a rail environment.

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if we need an employee to have excellent customer focus skills, we might pick a role play exercise assessing for customer service aptitude. If we are recruiting for a Safety Director, role that requires the ability to motivate and inspire others, we might use an SJT that measures people management and leadership potential.

Case study

Recently, the OPC worked with a new rail company operating in Australasia supporting them with the recruitment of key and specialised personnel. The company was a private enterprise operating in a predominately public transport environment. As an organisation they were keen to 'stand out' and lead the

Emily said: 'The client believed the assessment tool matrix really enhanced their selection process. It helped reinforce and affirm the recruiters' perceptions about each candidate's existing work performance. In addition, it helped inform future development needs. Not only for those candidates who were successful through the process, but also for those candidates who were unsuccessful, this time. The process was also valuable for those who might apply again in the future.'

In this case, the assessment tools were delivered online, in a supervised environment to a small number of internal candidates – at their workplace, which was some distance from the UK! The candidates' assessment tools were scored immediately

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