The views of managers and recruitment specialists in relation to migrants' opportunities in recruitment and selection processes in Australia

Amanda Daly[a], Michelle Barker[b] & Paul McCarthy[c]

[a]*Graduate School of Management, Griffith University, Australia*
[b]*School of Management, Griffith University, Australia*
[c]*School of Management, Griffith University, Australia*

Abstract

Australia's population is one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse. The proportion of Asian immigrants can be reasonably expected to rise significantly over the next 50 years. Despite many of these immigrants holding recognised qualifications and previous work experience, a high proportion are faced with unemployment, or employment in positions, which are not commensurate with their knowledge and abilities. This paper examines the views of managers and recruitment specialists and is part of a larger study investigating the experiences of South-east Asian migrants in recruitment and selection in Australia. Surveys were administered to Master of Business Administration students who are currently employed in management positions, and ten recruitment consultants.

Content analysis of responses indicated managers' and recruitment specialists' perceptions of the difficulties that migrants face in recruitment and selection, and their recommendations as to what migrants may do in relation to enhancing their behaviour and training options. Overall, communication and cultural issues were seen as central to the difficulties experienced by migrants in recruitment and selection processes. The findings of this study has implications for human resource professionals and employment support agencies who are actively involved with recruitment and selection in general, or who specialise in assisting migrants with job seeking. The need for intercultural communication and diversity management training is recommended.

Keywords
Cross-cultural communication; Recruitment; Selection

Introduction

Australia has one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world characterised by 160 different ethnic origins and more than 100 languages (Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, 1995). In June 1997, 23% of the population was born overseas, with 14% of people migrating from non-English speaking countries. Today, Australia's ethnic composition continues to change with the intake of more migrant and refugee groups (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999).

As commonly acknowledged, migrants from non-English speaking countries are more likely to be unemployed or employed in positions which are not commensurate with their skills and qualifications (Hawthorne, 1992; Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, 1996; Barker, 1994; Yuen, 1997; Mak, Westwood & Ishiyama, 1993). Similar difficulties with obtaining employment are not experienced by migrants from English speaking countries (Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, 1996; Hawthorne, 1992). Studies investigating unemployment amongst migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds have identified four causal factors: English language proficiency, qualifications and work experience, migration status, and length of residence (Yuen, 1997; Hawthorne, 1992). English language proficiency and length of residence are associated with communication competence and knowledge of local culture (Andersen, 1997). Cultural processes are learnt through observation and imitation, and therefore, through increasing length of residence and interacting with natural speakers, a migrant's abilities to communicate effectively within another language and culture may improve (Khoo, 1993; Smith & Bisazza, 1982).

Cross-cultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message, either intentionally or unintentionally, to a person from another culture (Hodge, 1987). An individual's cultural conditioning influences perception, interpretation and evaluation of all messages, (Hodge, 1987). Problems with cross-cultural communication arise when participants assume

sameness, and "they apply different notions of appropriateness"(Mead, 1998, p.143-144). Culture is primarily expressed through implicit and subtle nonverbal behaviours of which individuals have limited awareness (Andersen, 1997). Fundamental differences in cross-cultural communication involve space and distance; facial expressions; gestures and body movements; and, vocalics (Samovar & Porter, 1997). Other dimensions that affect cross-cultural communication include physical appearance, oculesics (messages sent by the eyes), time, and patterns of touch. Furthermore, the style of language use will alter the efficiency of communication.

Due to increasing globalisation, the transcendence of national borders and the rise of multinational organisations, the amount of cross-cultural contact has increased dramatically. The Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (1995) identified international trade and productivity as areas of concern for the Australian economy, with nine out of ten of Australia's fastest growing export markets being non-English speaking countries. If Australia is to succeed internationally, it is essential that cultural diversity is celebrated and managed effectively. Studies have shown that utilising the advantages of a diverse workforce provides valuable leverage when establishing trade and business overseas (Guy & Newman, 1998; Jenner, 1994; Smith & Carmody cited in Hay, 1996).

A substantial amount of international research has focused on recruitment and selection practises (Ryan, McFarland, Baron & Page, 1999; Wood & Payne, 1998; Arvey & Campion, 1982). Managers and recruitment specialists continue to use recruitment methods that are limited in their ability to attract a diverse range of applicants. Most selection assessment devices used today were "designed by and trialed in white people for use in predominantly white organisations where fluency in the English language is automatically assumed" (Wood & Payne, 1998, p.4-5). Therefore, human resource professionals need to look at using methods, which will not exclude individuals because of factors such as ethnicity and gender.

Extensive research has examined the efficacy of various selection methods (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Commission for Racial Equality cited in Wood & Payne, 1998; Arvey & Campion, 1982). The most important property of selection techniques is predictive validity, which is defined as "the ability to predict future job performance, job-related learning and other criteria" (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; p.262). Interestingly, Schmidt and Hunter's (1998) study revealed relatively poor validity for unstructured interviews ($r=0.38$), while structured interviews were reported to have greater validity($r=0.51$). Other studies have found similar results (Dunnette & Bass,

1963; Mayfield, 1964; Arvey, 1979; Noone, 1991). In direct contrast to the findings on validity, the interview continues to be the most common form of selection method that is used. Indeed, Wood and Payne (1998) found that over 95% of employers surveyed use interviews for all job types.

An applicant's success at interview is strongly related to the interviewer's perceptions and interpretations of verbal and nonverbal communication (Arvey & Campion, 1982). Using culturally appropriate nonverbal behaviours increases an applicant's ratings (Arvey & Campion, 1982). Farr (1973) found that early impressions are more important than factual information in determining interviewers' judgements. As interviewers interpret and weigh information differently, inter-rater reliability is low and interviewer experience does not alter reliability (Arvey & Campion, 1982).

Increasingly, HR activities are being outsourced (Klaas, Mc Clendon & Gainey, 1999). In the United States, "HR outsourcing generated $13.9b in 199 and is expected to reach $37.6b by 2003" (Klaas et al, 1999, p.113). The benefits include reducing costs, increasing incentives and accountabilities and increasing access to specialised expertise (Csoko, 1995). Despite this trend, controversy surrounds the question about who should perform the HR activities. External agencies are seen to lack organisation-specific knowledge. Further, Burton and Ryall (1995) purport that executive search firms are failing to recruit outside their known and "attitudinal" pool of candidates.

Given the multicultural nature of Australian society and on-going changes in the human resource management sector, it is important to examine employers' and recruitment specialists' perceptions of the difficulties experienced by migrants during job search. The study presented here is part of a larger research project that examines the experiences of South-east Asian migrants in recruitment and selection in Australia. In particular, this paper examines managers' and recruiters' responses in relation to the problems experienced by migrants in recruitment and selection. Additionally, it reports managers' and recruiters' recommendations as to what migrants need to do to improve their success in job seeking.

Methodology

Participants
The sample for this study consisted of 41 students undertaking a Master of Business Administration (MBA) at Griffith University, and 10 Recruitment Consultants.

Fifty-six MBA students enrolled on a part-time basis completed a questionnaire before a scheduled lecture. An essential criterion for inclusion in the sample was participants' professional experience in the areas of recruitment and selection. Fourteen respondents were excluded from the final sample because they indicated that they were not employed in management positions. Subjects were not excluded if they were born overseas, or if they came from a non-English speaking background (NESB).

A response rate of 98.2% was achieved, with 55 questionnaires returned. Those participants who were not currently employed in management positions were omitted, resulting in 41 valid cases. The majority of participants were aged 31 to 40 years (N= 20), with 12 participants aged 25-30 years and nine managers were aged 41-50 years. Males comprised a significant proportion of the sample, 82.9% (N= 34), with only seven female subjects identified.

Most respondents were employed in middle management (N=25). Twelve respondents were engaged in top management positions, and 4 were currently employed as first-line supervisors. There was an equal distribution of managers born in Australia (N=20) and overseas (N=21). Of the managers born overseas, 70% originate from a non-English speaking country (N= 14). These countries include: India; Belgium; Zimbabwe; Italy; Malaysia; China; South Korea; Hong Kong; and, Japan. The English speaking countries of origin were New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The distribution of respondents across industries was as follows: Construction (N=2), Finance (N=2), Health (N=5), Education (N=3), Retail (N=2), Hospitality (N=4), Sales/ Marketing (N=7); Government (N=6); Manufacturing (N=4) and Other (N=6). Other industries include non-profit, transport and communications.

Six recruitment agencies and Job Network agencies were identified, and recruitment specialists were invited to participate voluntarily in the study. The agencies are based in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane and all are representatives of large international recruitment consulting firms. The size of each firm in Australia ranges between 500 and 1600 full-time employees. Participants were required to be actively involved with recruitment and selection.

Employees within two of the six agencies approached in relation to the study declined the invitation due to work commitments Ten Recruitment Consultants (6 females and 4 males) from four agencies agreed to complete a survey that

was administered by the researchers in a one-to-one setting.

Participants were distributed evenly amongst the age categories: three were aged between 25 to 30 years; three were between 31 to 40 years; and four subjects were in the 41-50 year age group. Most respondents were born in Australia (N=6), two were born in English speaking countries and two came from non-English speaking countries. Countries include the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Vietnam.

Questionnaire
This paper reports the analysis of the three open-ended questions included in the questionnaire. The questions were:
What problems are migrants most likely to experience in the recruitment and selection process?
What recommendations would you make to migrants regarding their behaviour to improve their opportunities in the recruitment and selection process?
What recommendations would you make to migrants regarding their training to improve their opportunities in the recruitment and selection process?

The responses from the two groups of subjects (managers and recruiters) were content analysed. Categories were identified based upon similarities in the words used by respondents. The same categories were used for both groups. Responses were tallied within each category grouping. Due to the fact that one respondent may have provided multiple answers to each question, the total number in each category represents the number of responses, not the number of respondents.

Results

Respondents' Perceptions of Difficulties Experienced by Migrants

The perceived problems of migrants were grouped into seven categories. The categories were: Communication; Recognition of qualifications and skills; Knowledge of recruitment and selection processes; Culture; Racism; and, Attributes of the interviewer. For example, the category titled 'Communication' included responses such as "the use of English", "language difficulties " and "problems with comprehension".

The most frequently reported response in the category 'Recognition of qualifications and skills', referred to the fact that employers were uncertain of a migrant's background and experience, and whether their qualifications were recognised in Australia. In the category 'Knowledge of recruitment and

selection processes', managers and recruitment consultants stated that they believed that migrants experience problems because of "reduced awareness of the system in Australia" and "a lack of understanding of the process." Within the category of 'Culture', respondents identified "not knowing the norms here" and "different cultural background" as sources of problems for migrants who seek employment in Australia. The categories 'Confidence', 'Racism' and 'Attributes of the interviewer' were very small, with only one or two responses in each category. Examples of responses include: "lack of confidence'; "racial discrimination'; and, "interviewer's resistance to make changes".

The category of 'Communication' was the most frequently used category of response by both groups. Almost 51% of the responses of managers and 44.4% of the responses of recruitment specialists referred to communication difficulties as a major problem for migrants seeking employment. 'Culture' was the next largest category for managers (30.5%) and recruitment specialists (22.2%). 'Recognition of qualifications and skills' was more frequently used by recruitment consultants (22.2%), than by managers (6.8%).

Respondents' Recommendations about Migrants' Behaviour

Managers and recruitment consultants were asked to recommend how migrants could improve their opportunities in the recruitment and selection process. Seven categories of responses were used: Communication; Organisation; Australian culture; Local people; Practise; Employment agencies; and, Education/ skills. The category of 'Communication' included responses such as "learn English"; "ask questions"; "be frank and to the point"; "speak clearly" and, "expand vocabulary". Within the category 'Organisation', respondents' recommendations focused on the need to "undertake research about the targeted organisation". The purpose of the research is "to gain as much information as possible about the interviewers and the culture of the organisation". The most common responses in relation to the category of 'Australian culture' include "appreciate Australian culture"; "try to Westernise"; and, "good manners". Responses which were included in the category of 'Education/ skills' include: "do a job seek training course"; "arrange a higher education"; and "local qualifications or work experience". The smaller categories of 'Local people', 'Practise' and 'Employment agency' comprised responses related to "getting to know local people", and gaining experience with recruitment and selection processes through practise and utilising a employment agency.

The most frequently reported responses by managers (39.1%) related to the category of 'Communication'. A further 31.7% of responses corresponded with the category of 'Australian culture'. In contrast, one third of the recruitment specialists' responses (30.9%) were in the category 'Practise'. Recruitment specialists recommended that migrants practise their interviewing skills and other skills related to recruitment and selection processes. The categories of 'Communication' and 'Organisation' both reflected 19.2% of the total responses of recruitment specialists.

Respondents' Recommendations about Training

Managers and recruitment consultants were asked to recommend how migrants could use training to improve their opportunities in the recruitment and selection process. Predictably, there were some overlap in the responses to this question and the previous question about migrant's behaviour. The following categories were identified in relation to training: Network; Courses; Research; English; Cultural knowledge and skills; and Local experience. Many of the responses were very similar to those used in relation to the question about migrants' behaviour. The category of 'Network' was characterised by responses that suggested an "active involvement in affiliated groups". Examples of responses within the category 'Courses' include "do a job search training course"; "train in the marketable courses which are high in demand"; "get qualifications"; and, "'ozify' current qualifications and upgrade if possible". The category 'English' included recommendations about "language training", and "improving their communication skills in English". The responses within the category 'Research' revolved around the issues of investigating an employer's requirements and expectations. The category 'Local experience' included responses such as "get as much experience here as possible". Responses within the category 'Cultural knowledge and skill' are similar to the category titled 'Australian culture' used in relation to the earlier question about migrant's behaviour. Here, responses include comments such as "understand local cultural preferences and behaviour".

'Courses' was the most frequently used category by managers, with 29.4% of responses indicating managers' perceptions about the need for migrants to undergo further education and training. This was closely followed be the categories of 'English' (26.5%) and 'Research' (17.6%). Interestingly, the recruitment specialists identified the categories of 'Network' and 'Cultural knowledge and skills' to be very important, with the 31.1% of all responses falling in these categories. 17% of responses from

recruitment specialists indicated that 'English' is an area in which migrants could benefit from further training.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that there is substantial agreement between managers and recruitment specialists about the problems experienced by migrants, and the recommendations about how migrants could improve their effectiveness during recruitment and selection processes.

Interestingly the responses from both managers and recruiters indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents interpreted the word 'migrant' in the questions to mean a migrant from a non-English Speaking country. As such, communication and cultural issues were seen as central to difficulties experienced by migrants in recruitment and selection processes. The results in relation to the question about perception of the problems migrants experience reflect Hawthorne's (1992) study of migrant engineers. She found that communication, culture and recognition of qualifications and skills significantly affect a migrant's performance in a job interview.

It appears that managers and recruiters are aware of the difficulties that many migrants experience in the recruitment and selection process. However, studies indicate that both groups continue to use practices which are detrimental to a migrant's success in gaining employment, such as overemphasising the importance of specific behaviour during interviews (Ryan, McFarland, Baron & Page, 1999; Wood & Payne, 1998; Arvey & Campion, 1982; Levy-Leboyer, 1994). Surprisingly, only one manager identified the interviewer as a potential source of difficulty for migrants in the recruitment and selection process. The respondent, who was from a non-English speaking country, stated: "the interviewer may be resistant to make adjustments". In theory, the responsibility for effective communication is shared between both parties, however, research suggests that in practice, this does not occur (Hawthorne, 1992). FitzGerald (1997) highlights the need for Australian managers to examine their communication skills, as very few managers are bilingual. He further purports that it seems that Australians are the source of the problem in this situation, rather than migrants (FitzGerald, 1997).

Since managers and recruiters saw issues regarding culture and communication as fundamental to migrants' success, a number of their recommendations refer to areas for training. Specific areas identified include:

* Learn English and improve communication skills. Only approximately 7% of a message is

conveyed verbally. So therefore, learning a new language does not immediately equate to communicative competence. Given that most communication occurs at the unconscious level, it is unfair to expect migrants to be effective in all forms of communication (Barker, 1994). Nonverbal behaviours cannot be taught; they are subtle processes, which can only be learned through observation and imitation.

* Learn about and adopt the Australian culture. The importance of cultural awareness must be a two-way process if it is to be effective. According to Mead (1988, p. 17), "The manager cannot expect to force-fit members of another culture into his/her own culture". Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama & Barker (1999) also identified that migrants may resist learning and adopting the social norms in a new country. Such pressure to lose one's 'identity' may result in feeling resentful and devalued (Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama & Barker, 1999). Studies have identified the importance of managers developing cultural awareness and expanding their interpersonal skills to be more effective in the area of cross-cultural communication (FitzGerald, 1997; The Public Service Commission, 1990; Industry Task Force on Leadership & Management Skills, 1995).
* Obtain qualifications and/or upgrade qualifications. Clearly, the need for relevant, up-to-date qualifications is crucial in the selection process. Of the 84 413 migrants arriving in Australia in 1998-1999, 55.2% were in the workforce prior to migration and 62.5% of all migrants were skilled (Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs, 1999). Nevertheless, recognition of qualifications obtained in another country is a source of enormous difficulty for migrants in Australia.

Overall, there was considerable agreement between the responses of managers and recruiters. The results of this study reveal that they are able to identify problems that migrants from non-English Speaking countries experience when seeking a job in Australia. However their recommendations regarding changing migrants' behaviours and training reflect misunderstandings about migrants' qualifications and abilities. There appears to be a strong emphasis that communication problems are attributable to the migrants. There is little awareness of the potential limitations in their own cross-cultural communication abilities, and the need for managers and recruiters to seek training in working effectively with clients from diverse backgrounds.

This study has implications for recruitment specialists and managers, and those individuals engaged in assisting migrants to gain employment in

Australia. Clearly, further investigation of migrants' experiences in Australian recruitment and selection processes needs to be conducted. The authors plan to analyse the findings of this study in the context of the larger study that examines the perceptions of migrants, as well as those of recruiters and managers.

References

Andersen, P. 1997. Cues of culture: The Basis of Intercultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication. In L.A.Samovar & R.E.Porter (eds). Intercultural Communication A Reader.8th edn. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Arvey, R.D. & Campion, J.E. 1982. The Employment Interview: A Summary and Review of Recent Research. Personnel Psychology 35: 281- 319.

Arvey, R.D. 1979. Fairness in selecting employees. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.

Arvey, R.D. 1979. Unfair Discrimination in the employment interview: legal and psychological aspects. Psychological Bulletin 86: 736-765.

Barker, M.C. 1994. Issues in Cross-culturalism in Human Service Organisations. Brisbane: Griffith University.

Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, (1996), Population Flow Data, http://www.immi.gov.au/population/flow-dec99.htm

Burton, C & Ryall, C. 1995. Managing for Diversity. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Csoko, L.S. 1995. Rethinking human resources: A research report. The Conference Board Report No: 1134-95.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, (1999), Key Facts, http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/02key-1.htm

Dunnette, M.D. & Bass, B.M. 1963. Behavioural scientists and personnel management. Industrial Relations 2: 115-130

Farr, J.L. 1973. Response requirements and primary-recency effects in a simulated selection interview. Journal of Applied Psychology, 57:228-233.

FitzGerald, S. 1997. Is Australia an Asian country? Can Australia survive in an East Asian future? NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Guy, M.E. & Newman, M.A. 1998. Toward Diversity in the Workplace in Condrey, S.E. (ed). Handbook of Human Resource Management in Government. California: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Hawthorne, L. 1992. Migrant Engineers' Job Interview Performance: A Cross-cultural Analysis. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics 15(2):90-119.

Hay, C. 1996. Managing Cultural Diversity Opportunities for enhancing the competitive advantage of Australian business. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Hodge, A. 1987. Communicating Across Cultures: An ABC of Cultural Awareness. NSW: Janus Resources

Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills. 1995. Enterprising Nation. Renewing Australia's Managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific Century. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Jenner, L. 1994. Diversity Management: What does it mean ? HR Focus 71:11

Klaas, B.S., Mc Clendon, J. & Gainey, T.W. 1999. HR outsourcing and its impact: The role of transaction costs. Personnel Psychology 52(1):113-136.

Khoo, S.E. 1993. BIPR Bulletin 10 November, 1993.

Luvy-Leboyer, C. 1994. Selection and assessment in Europe. In H.C. Triandis, M.D. Dunnette & L.M. Hough (eds). Handbook of industrial and organisational psychology Vol. 4. California: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Mak, A.S., Westwood, M.J. & Ishiyama, F.I. 1993. Developing Role-Based Social Competencies for Career Search and Development in Hong Kong immigrants. Journal of Career Development, 20(3): 171-183.

Mak, A.S., Westwood, M.J., Ishiyama, F.I. & Barker, M.C. 1999. Optimising Conditions for Learning Sociocultural competencies for Success. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 23(1): 77-90.

Mayfield, E.C. 1964. The selection interview: A re-evaluation of published research. Personnel Psychology, 17: 239-260.

Mead, R. 1998. International management: Cross-cultural dimensions. Oxford: Blackwell Business.

Noone, L. 1991. Recruitment for Results- The PICC Approach to Staff Selection. Melbourne: Longman Professional.

Ryan, A.M., Mc Farland, L., Baron, H. & Page, R. 1999. An International Look at Selection practices: Nation and culture as explanations for variability in practice. Personnel Psychology, 52: 359-391.

Samovar, L.A. & Porter, R.E. (eds). Intercultural Communication A Reader. 8th edn. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Schmidt, F.L. & Hunter, J.E. 1998. The Validity and Utility of Selection methods in Personnel Psychology: Practical and Theoretical findings of 85 years of research findings. Psychological Bulletin, 124(2): 262-274.

Smith, L. & Bisazza, J. 1982. The comprehensibility of three varieties of English for college students in seven countries. Language Learning, 32: 259-269.

The Public Service Commission. 1990. Maximising Diversity. A Report on the Employment of People of Non-English Speaking Background in the Australian Public Service. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Wood, R. & Payne, T. 1998. Competency Based Recruitment and Selection A Practical Guide. England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Yuen, Ti. Foong. 1997. English Language as a Factor in the Appointment of Academics of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds: A Case Study at one Australian University. Unpublished Master of Education (Applied Linguistics) dissertation. University of Western Australia.