

Round Peg, Round Hole - By Ralf Borchert

2008-09-19

A formal tool developed to ensure human resourcing matches the roles and purpose of the function and reduces the cost of failure.

Have you ever wondered why some managers were appointed to their jobs? Or why supposedly highly qualified personnel brought into organizations sometimes unveil themselves as apparently incompetent? Or why newly-appointed executives may find that the expectations that they had about a new employer are quickly dashed? Good employees and good companies don't turn bad overnight. So what does happen?

There can sometimes be a mismatch between the role and purpose of a function and the human resources hired to realize the job role.

The most common cause of executive failure is when there is a mismatch between the definition of the role, purpose of the job and the expectations of the individual hired.

Such a mismatch can be compared to the procurement of resources for a particular purpose, the purposes and expectations of all concerned must be thoroughly explored to ensure a match. It is much the same in recruitment. Resources are the people, money and time. The total cost of recruiting an executive who subsequently turns out to be a misfit can be dwarfed by the cost of replacing the person, plus the lost opportunities for the role to be effective and the human cost and de-motivating effect on co-workers. So what can be done to avoid the pitfalls of recruiting a square peg into a round hole?

The first step in any resourcing is the identification of the business need. The business need is a statement of what the business in this context needs to achieve to be successful. Too often structures and role descriptions represent a snapshot of one answer to the challenges faced by the organization two, five or more years ago, or are rooted in outmoded stereotype jobs that are no longer even necessary for the business. For example, with the trend in developed cities for guests to eat outside the hotel, the availability of outsourcing options and the ability to convert the restaurant into retail space, the job of Executive Chef is increasingly under pressure. Especially as the signature restaurant chefs tend to be "special" characters with their own distinct and often ebullient personality that do not benefit from technical supervision and are often unwilling to report to other food and beverage employees whom do not respect.

Whenever a vacancy arises it may be worth considering whether the job can be eliminated or certain jobs or functions be combined.

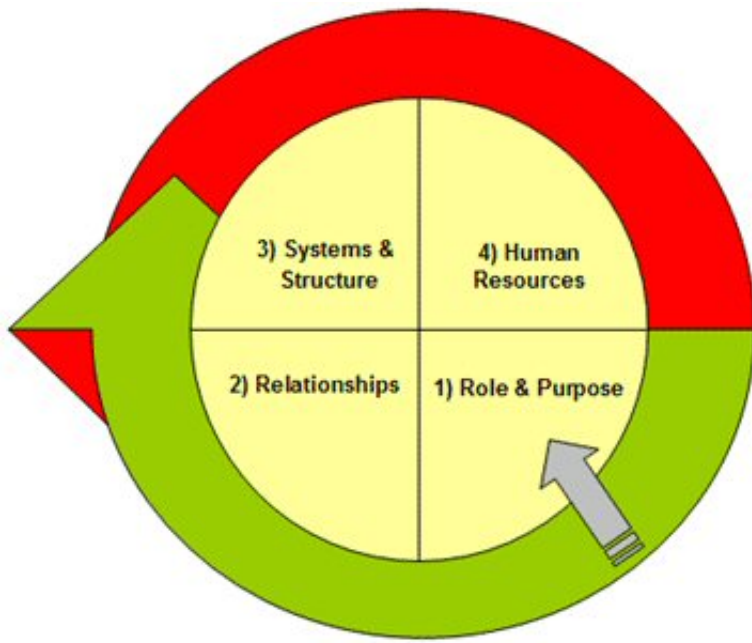
Revisiting the business need can challenge the status quo and open new opportunities. As a further example, the increased use of online booking impacts the scale and nature of the sales force needed. To determine the business need and plan the recruitment process, it can make sense to convene a cross-functional team to undertake the review and assessment. This can help secure engagement from the post's key stakeholders and open up new perspectives on the role purpose.

Having determined a business strategy, we then need to consider what resources will be required to execute that strategy. It is no longer appropriate to initiate the recruitment process just because the incumbent has vacated the position. One key question we need to ask is "Do we still require that resource, human or not?" and "If we do need that resource, is the role unchanged or are there new challenges or opportunities?" Having explored these questions you can then begin to explore how to dimension the post and begin the recruitment process.

As recruitment and procurement share the requirement to match resources with needs, one tool that can be adapted comes from the discipline of procurement. In the course of advising organizations in transforming their procurement frame work, Neville Parkin(1) encountered that procurement teams and departments would not be effective at fulfilling their roles and purposes if not optimally set-up in terms of organizational alignment, relationships, systems and structures as well as skills and know-how. In essence, he makes a case for elevating procurement from a transactional clerical function to a core business discipline. To illustrate why some organizations have effective procurement functions and others have not, he developed a simple framework, the Parkin Wheel.

However, it can be transposed beyond optimally positioning the procurement function with an organization. The Parkin Wheel can also enable diligent consideration when planning a successful recruitment.

Fig. 1 Parkin Wheel (abridged)



Parkin's research has found that in the least successful procurement organizations, companies start at "4" in the diagram and try to operate using existing staff, systems and relationships whilst creating a new role a purpose.

This same rational can be applied to other areas of a business and what happens is that organizations decide. "We need to get into e-Marketing so let's hire an e-Marketing Manager."

During many years working with advising companies on optimizing spending and allocation of resources, I observed that in many instances the employee, once appointed, is not effective regardless of qualification or past track record. In this example, once appointed, the e-marketing manager might seek to appoint further posts to the function, and to re-engineer the company's processes [3 in the diagram above].

Next the new post holder may try to understand and change the relationships with key internal stakeholders. Based upon their success-or otherwise, in doing this the role of e-marketing will be realized. If the resources are inadequate, the processes dysfunctional and if the relationships with stakeholders don't work, then all these factors will impact the functional role. It is entirely possible that the actual role of e-marketing and the intended role end up being very different.

In adapting Parkin's work, I propose that the recruitment process should reverse the direction around his wheel to create sustainable change.

1) Role and Purpose, start here!

To avoid expensive recruitment mistakes, conduct a review of the business need for the organization and the post considering the organization's trading environment, image environment and macro environment (see fig 2 Parkin Wheel complete). Are the company's products in demand? Who are the competitors (other companies, replacement products or services)? What are the economical and political circumstances? And finally, what are the technology impacts upon the business and the post?

2) Relationships

Once the post's raison d'être and purpose are established, the next step is to examine the existing organizational structure and determine where and how the post holder will need to relate to internal and external stakeholders. Which teams will the post holder need to join and who will they meet in what forums? Too often, middle managers can frustrate change plans as they defend the status quo. So what needs to change to make the new post holder successful? What kind of senior level sponsorship is needed?

3) Systems and Structures

Next examine what systems or structures are in place or need to be established or amended to support the role and purpose. Systems and structures include procedures, policies, IT and communication solutions. For example, our e-marketing manager may need to have direct IT support. Or Client Briefs may need to be reviewed by the e-marketing manager prior to submission by the ad agency.

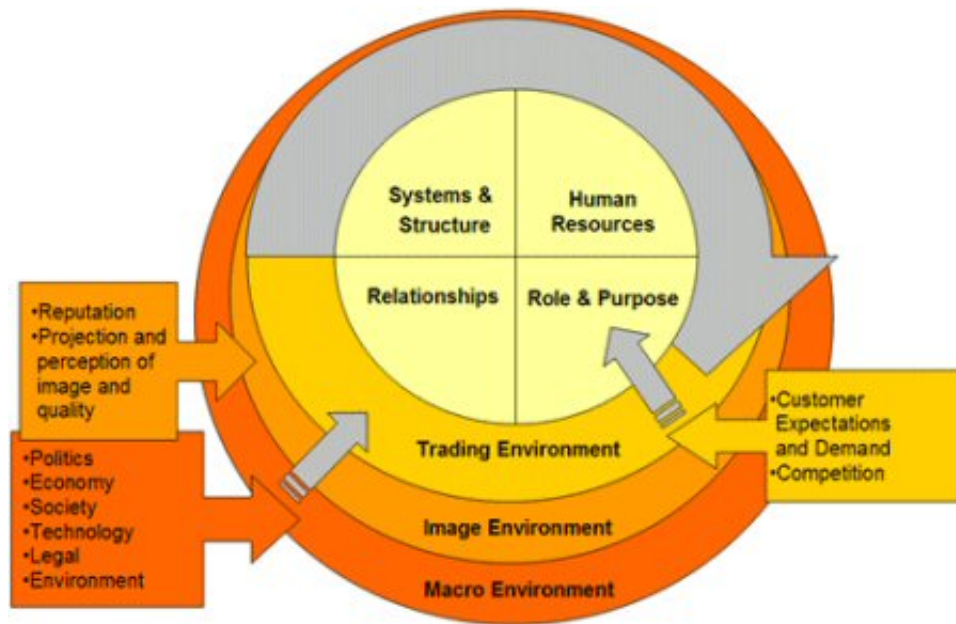
Once items 1-3 have been resolved, the organization should focus on the resources needed to fulfill the role within the organization.

4) Identification of competencies and the person (i.e. the HUMAN RESOURCE)

This step may result in the post being defined differently, as the journey around the Parkin Wheel may expose behavioural attributes that the post holder needs to possess. In some cases, the Parkin Wheel may challenge whether the organization fills the post by hiring resources, as there may be more value in outsourcing. And if there is a need to support a role and purpose through the appointment or replacement of personnel, then the organization will know how to empower its people and what the required competencies are.

The above process is relevant in circumstances of recruiting a new expertise into an organization as well as when replacing a person because roles and purposes change over time, as do the trading, image and macro environments a company is operating in. Hence a competency profile or organizational positioning that was appropriate once may not be appropriate at other times.

Fig. 2 Parkin Wheel



The total cost of recruitment and retention will be considerably reduced, and the effectiveness and satisfaction increased for both the organization and individual employee when the processes described above is followed.

The rigour of this process is most appropriate for posts from middle management to senior level executives, and as the impact of a poor appointment is greatest at these levels. The integration of the Parkin Wheel into the recruitment process is a sound investment and will have the biggest impact on the performance of the organization and the people working within it.

Now we can ensure we have a round peg for a round hole.

Ralf Borchert is Vice President with HVS Executive Search in Hong Kong. His on-line profile is available here: <http://hvs.com/Personnel/Ralf.Borchert.aspx> and he can be contacted at rborchert@hvs.com.

(1) J Neville Parkin, quoted in Profitable Purchasing Strategies, Steele and Court, McGraw Hill, 1996

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