



# UNIT-2

## The Recruitment Cycle

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand each stage of the recruitment cycle
- ✓ Consider the consequences of bypassing stages within the recruitment cycle
- ✓ Discuss the basics of candidate management and client acquisition

## Unit 2

### The Recruitment Cycle

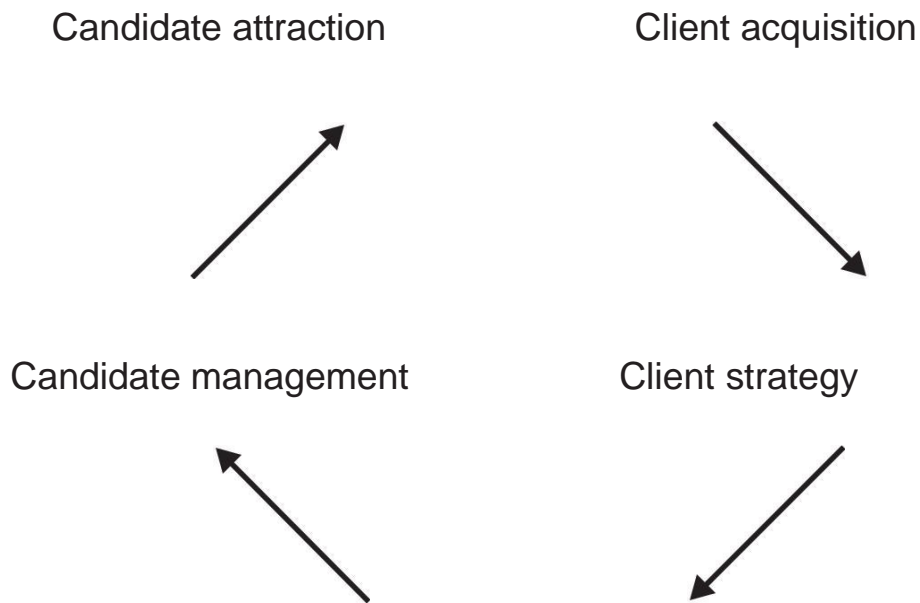
Prior to making any important decisions about your business, you need to ensure you understand the logistics of successful recruitment. In this unit, we will be taking a closer look at the four component stages within the recruitment cycle.

Similar to the learning cycle, the recruitment cycle provides a concise overview of the most important elements in the recruitment framework. While it's possible to start at any given place within the cycle, there are four key activities that combine to facilitate effective and successful recruitment. The time and attention you dedicate to each of these stages will influence the success (or otherwise) of the outcome.

Working as a recruiter, it can be difficult to know where to start with the recruitment process. If you work as a recruiter with an established agency, you will probably have a set range of responsibilities and know exactly what to do on a day-to-day basis. If you run your own agency or work solo, it's up to you to determine how, when and where to get started. This is where the difficulty lies in choosing a starting point within the recruitment cycle.

The image below provides a concise visual overview of the recruitment process, broken down into each of its four component stages. It is a cyclical process, meaning you can start anywhere within the cycle, but it only ever moves one way. Each of the activities within the cycle comprises any number of other tasks, which must be completed adequately before moving on to the next stage. The complexity and involvement of each task along the way will always vary from one candidate, employer and placement to the next. No stage is technically more important than any other, as they all play key roles in the successful recruitment process.

Building a detailed knowledge of the recruitment cycle will help you perform your day-to-day duties more confidently and efficiently. This is where the basic top-down view of the recruitment cycle provided below may prove helpful, presenting each of the four recruitment stages as simplistically as possible.



**Figure 2.1 The recruitment cycle**

The cycle detailed here shows how recruitment happens from start to finish. Once again, the recruitment consultant has the option of starting at any point in the cycle, but they must nonetheless progress through all four points in a clockwise direction. While it is technically possible to skip a section in the cycle, doing so can compromise the quality of the service you provide. If you intend to meet or exceed the expectations of your clients and candidates, all four stages must be covered.

In a working example, you could find yourself working with an outstanding candidate for whom you have the perfect position in mind. If you choose to skip the 'candidate management' stage, you risk failing to meet the expectations of the client and the placement could be a failure. Candidate management includes screening, interviewing and qualifying candidates for roles, after which you have the knowledge you need to pair them with their perfect positions.

The cycle then moves on to client acquisition, wherein a strategy needs to be developed for the client to ensure successful candidate placement.

Alternatively, an agent may begin the recruitment cycle with a vacancy or brief. In this case, you are technically starting at the 'client strategy' stage (aka client strategy), as you already have a client who has provided you with the vacancy to fill. If you work as an in-house recruiter with an established agency, you may have very little involvement in client acquisition. It all depends on your position and responsibilities.

You may already have a client that has more than 200 vacancies to fill, and you've been tasked with handling the entire process. As the roles are ready to be filled and the client is already on your books, you can move onto the 'client acquisition' stage and then 'candidate management'.

In instances where a candidate has been acquired and placed by someone else, it might be appropriate to start out at the candidate management phase of the cycle. You may or may not have a suitable client in mind for them already, which will determine whether you need to focus on client acquisition. You may also start out at the client strategy stage if you are contacted by one of your existing clients, who wishes to discuss a new role or vacancy with you.

In a nutshell, all stages of the recruitment cycle must be undertaken with equal priority, though do not necessarily need to be handled by you. They could be the responsibility of someone else in the recruitment team, or may have already been completed to some extent – like client acquisition when you already have a long list of clients with vacancies to fill.

Once again, the important thing to remember is that you can start at any position, but you must ensure you move in a clockwise direction *and* that all phases of the recruitment cycle have been addressed. Your role and job description will determine the extent to which you play a part in each of the component stages. Some recruitment consultants are hired exclusively to find, attract and secure clients. Others specialise primarily in employee screening and interview processes.

It's commonplace for multiple persons (or large teams) to work together on the recruitment process. When this is the case, it's rare for any one person to handle *all* stages of the recruitment cycle singlehandedly.

In order to build a more detailed understanding of the recruitment cycle, we will now be taking a closer look at its four component stages in-depth.

## Candidate Management

Every candidate needs a certain amount of management and support. However, this is an area of the recruitment cycle that is often overlooked in terms of importance, or skipped-over entirely. All of which could pose a threat to your recruitment business. Particularly in an era of such ferocious competition, the extent to which you develop good working relationships with candidates really can make all the difference.

It's important to remember that every satisfied candidate you work with could refer any number of further candidates to your business. By contrast, one dissatisfied candidate could be all it takes to spark an all-round PR crisis. Hence, every candidate needs to be shown the time, attention and priority they deserve. Always remember that it's your reputation and future performance on the line.

### Case study

In a working example, an individual is looking for a driving job in a certain town or city in the UK. Rather than simply throwing them directly at any client willing to hire them, you get to know them on a deeper level. You discuss their background, experience, specialist skills, ambitions and so on. You get them ready for their interviews, assist with their CV development and pinpoint their perfect position. Ultimately, they secure a job they're delighted with and recommend your services to five of their former colleagues. Three of these colleagues sign up with your agency, who then recommend your services to another group of people, and the cycle continues.

Candidate management is linear – what you do at the start influences everything that happens afterwards. From initial outreach to the first stages of screening to interview preparation to CV development and so on, each step has significant and wide-reaching influence. Like with the recruitment cycle itself, skipping tasks within the candidate management stage is possible, but not necessarily recommended. At least, not for *all* candidates you deal with.

The step-by-step approach to candidate management is based on the core principles of managing expectations. As Steven Covey (1989) advises in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, you should 'begin with the end in mind'.

The 'end in mind' is likely to be that:

- The candidates take a job or a contract they have secured through you or in your company.
- They are part of your short-list as a qualified and motivated applicant for your client's role.
- You have built a good relationship with them for a future placement.

- They help you by sourcing other candidates.
- They refer you to other candidates and clients.
- Your relationship with them has enhanced your consultancy or company brand.
- They become clients.

Candidate management could also be referred to as the candidate experience. Hence, you need to put yourself in the position of the candidate and consider the quality of the service you're providing. If you were in their shoes, what would you expect? What would be the standout qualities you're looking for in a recruitment agency? What would deliver that all-important 'wow' factor?

Again, it's unlikely that you and you alone will shoulder *every* candidate management task and responsibility. Nevertheless, you will be expected to contribute to some of the most important tasks, including but not limited to the following:

- Taking telephone calls from prospective candidates, ensuring you have the knowledge and expertise needed to answer their questions and generally introduce your agency. An outgoing, welcoming and friendly tone is mandatory at all times.
- Helping clients enhance and generally polish-up their CVs. You'll therefore need to have a good grasp of proper CV structure, along with the hallmarks of a good CV and how they are handled by employers.
- Producing rejection letters and emails, or informing candidates they were unsuccessful by telephone.
- Writing advertisement copy for vacancies to be marketed online and offline. You may be presented with nothing more than a very basic job description and expected to handle the rest yourself.
- Initial candidate evaluation processes, determining whether the client has the mandatory basic skills and experience needed to fill the role.
- Qualifying candidates in or out of roles, which will involve initial screening processes, carefully consulting their CVs and organising interviews. You may be required to carry out interviews over the telephone, in person or a combination of the two.
- Candidate interviews represent a critically important task within the candidate management phase of the recruitment cycle. Interviews vary from informal chats over the phone to intensive in-person screenings that may involve more than one interviewer. This is where you will learn more about the candidate than at any other point in the screening process, helping you determine if they're suitable for the job.

- You will also play a role in ensuring all candidates are suitably prepared for any interviews that follow with the employer directly. Some candidates require more extensive coaching than others – many may have never attended a formal interview before.
- Post-interview conversations and the delivery of feedback can help candidates learn from their mistakes and capitalise on their strengths.
- Ensuring the candidate provides sufficient referrals and evidence of the skills and experience could also be your responsibility. You may need to contact their referees directly, if adequate formal documentation cannot be provided.
- Any candidates that are deemed unsuitable for the job should NOT simply be discarded and forgotten about. Ensure they are considered for other vacancies, or referred to a different agency if you have nothing suitable on the books at the time.
- Handling complaints from candidates is also part of the job and a key element of the candidate management process. Particularly where things don't go well, you could find yourself on the receiving end of heavy criticism and accusations.
- Recruitment consultants may need to 'market' candidates to clients, in order to persuade them they're the right people for the job. Of course, this should only be done when 100% confident in the candidate's capabilities and suitability.

## Case study

It's not uncommon for a potential recruit to have a honed set of specialist skills and a fantastic personality, though to struggle severely with CV and interview skills. Hence, they may have been passed over time and time again, despite being the ideal candidate for the job.

As a recruitment consultant, it's your job to help these kinds of recruits present themselves in the best possible light. If you can help them create a high-impact CV and build the confidence to nail the interview, the rest takes care of itself. This is why the role of the recruitment consultant must never be viewed as passive or robotic. You can, should and hopefully will make a big difference in the lives of the candidates you work with.

It's also why it is of such importance to read between the lines and consider each candidate as carefully as possible. Just because a CV isn't up to much, it doesn't mean the candidate isn't pure gold. You're there to see the potential in the candidates you work with and do whatever you can to tap into their potential. Not to simply discount those who struggle to put together a decent CV

## Client Acquisition

The next stage of the recruitment cycle concerns the logistics of finding clients (employers) to work with. The key to successful client acquisition lies in relationship management. It's not as simple as just securing a client and expecting to hold onto them long-term. If you want to keep them on your books, you need to work hard to develop strong and lasting relationships. Remember – the client is your customer, and the customer is always right!

Ultimately, it's the clients you secure that will pay your wages. No clients = no money, which means a business that won't work. Hence, the importance of focusing heavily on both initial client attraction and the nurturing of long-term relationships.

### **Candidate acquisition activities include:**

- Researching the market and identifying clients for your recruitment agency, which must be within a relevant sector or specialist field (driving, IT, catering etc).
- Reaching out to senior managers and speaking directly with decision-makers. Too much time is wasted by recruiters conversing with low-level admin staff with no authority.
- Creating an initial outreach strategy that effectively introduces your agency to potential clients. Traditional cold-calling is becoming increasingly ineffective, so you'll need to consider a multitude of more contemporary communication channels.
- Getting to know the current client strategy for the organisation in question, in order to ensure you can offer something superior...or more cost-effective.
- Assessing the general staffing requirements of the prospective client. How many staff do they recruit? How many vacancies are they looking to fill at any one time?
- A constant process of networking and introductions, making as many contacts as you can along the way.
- Handling complaints and objections from clients, ensuring you do whatever it takes to keep them happy and on your side. Again, the customer is always right...even when they're wrong.
- Organising telephone conversation and in-person meetings with managers and representatives from the target organisation. Don't be surprised if they ask to visit your offices for a tour.
- Assessing the performance of your closest competitors and ensuring you're performing at a higher level.

## Case study

A newly-established recruitment company specialising in driver jobs reaches out to a series of major supermarket chains. The agent uses LinkedIn to bypass initial gatekeepers and contact the hiring managers directly. Prior to doing so, extensive research has been carried out into each brand's current logistics partners and their general hiring practices.

It's also noted that there's constant demand for new drivers – full time and part time – with flexible working hours and both temporary and permanent contracts available. Firmly believing they can get the job done, the agency makes contact with the supermarkets and organises meetings accordingly.

The recruitment agent provides a detailed overview of the business they run, including its key strengths and success stories to date. The meeting ends with the agreement of a collaboration on a trial basis, with no contractual obligations. The recruitment agent fills a handful of temporary driving vacancies, 'wows' the client with the quality of the service provided and the client subsequently considers the agency for long-term involvement.

In the meantime, the drivers recruited are equally satisfied and recommend the services of the agency to their own contacts and colleagues.

## Client Strategy (aka Client Strategy)

Also referred to as 'client strategy', client strategy is the part of the process that involves providing a bespoke recruitment solution to suit the needs of the client. Across the board, clients are looking for agents that provide them with qualified and capable staff, filling vacancies as promptly as possible and doing so for an affordable price. Only when all three of these boxes are ticked will the client be happy with the services provided.

Client strategy means focusing on your strengths and accepting your limitations. Under no circumstances should you attempt to satisfy the requirements of a client that's wildly outside your field of expertise. If you don't know their industry or sector inside out, you shouldn't pretend otherwise.

The extent to which you play a role in client strategy development will be determined by your role and job description within the agency. However, it represents one of the most important aspects of running a successful recruitment company.

## Client Strategy Activities

**An effective recruitment or client strategy may include the following:**

- Developing and launching media campaigns
- Initial search list development.
- Developing a search pitch.
- Evaluating a job role.
- Developing a role and person specification.
- Offering benchmarking of salaries.
- Taking a requirement including advising on the necessity for flexibility.
- Selling a retained piece of work.
- Helping the client develop a sales proposition for prospective candidates.
- Operational research to build up a talent bank and recruit middle management or specialist technical resource, either run in-house or by a research specialist agency or a combination of both.
- Internal direct applicant model supplemented by an agency management scheme;
- Internal recruitment referral scheme.
- Agency contingency service, including using the agency database and perhaps an informal networking/referral approach.
- retained agency approach.
- A fully outsourced recruitment service.
- Exclusive agency supplier agreements.
- Developing a compelling role proposition.
- Developing a candidate briefing pack.
- Writing a service proposal – both internal and external to the client.
- Laying out a search or advertisement response report.

## Candidate Attraction

Your agency's approach to candidate attraction will play a key role in determining its success or otherwise. If you cannot provide access to the ideal candidates for any given job role, discerning clients will look elsewhere for recruitment support.

Along with attracting candidates with the knowledge, experience and acumen to get the job done, it's also worth focusing on recruits with scarce skills. If you want to gain a competitive advantage, you

need to offer something your closest rivals cannot. Or perhaps, find a better and/or more cost-effective way of offering it.

Ultimately, candidates are the lifeblood that fuels your entire business. If you aren't capable of offering exceptional candidates, you cannot and will not succeed. Once again, therefore, it is a stage within the recruitment cycle that demands a great deal of time and attention.

## Candidate Attraction Activities

**Typical activities that fall within the field of candidate attraction include the following:**

- Using online portals and forums to access and consider prospective candidates' CVs.
- Reaching out to quality candidates on social platforms like LinkedIn.
- Working on the image and profile of your recruitment agency, ensuring it is marketed to the right audience and presented as a superior option for discerning candidates.
- Maintaining a database of CVs that can be used to contact candidates who may be suitable for future vacancies.
- Creating and publishing professional job descriptions, outlining the requirements of the position in a clear and concise way.
- Publishing advertisements and marketing materials online and offline, in accordance with the audience being targeted.
- Advertising both individual job roles and the agency as a whole, using a variety of digital and conventional channels.
- Mastering the art of headhunting to secure the best talent before your competitors do.
- Carefully considering CVs and organising interviews with prospective candidates.
- Developing a candidate referral scheme, wherein some kind of incentive is offered for those who recommend your services to others.
- Reaching out to candidates who have been recommended to you by friends, family members, colleagues and existing recruits.
- Perfecting your 'sales pitch' and knowing exactly how to present your offer in an engaging and inspiring way.
- Creating compelling content for your website and your online marketing materials, while ensuring your agency is easy to find via the major search engines.
- Continually monitoring your performance and that of your competitors, in order to ensure you stay one step ahead at all times.

- Maintaining a complete log of your activities, allowing you to determine which channels/methods have proved most successful and which are not delivering the required results.

## Where to Start In The Recruitment Cycle

As previously touched up, it is perfectly possible to start at any position within the recruitment cycle. For the most part, it's a case of first determining whether you are currently in a candidate-rich or candidate-short environment.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it easier to pick up roles to work on than it is candidates?
- Do clients call you with jobs to fill?
- Do your candidates typically have several job offers?
- Are counter-offers prevalent?

If the answer to these above questions is 'yes', this would suggest you're working in a candidate-short environment. As such, it makes sense to begin the recruitment cycle at the candidate attraction stage, so that you can boost the numbers of candidates available for more effective allocation/deployment.

At the other end of the scale, the following questions should be considered:

- Do your advertisements generate heavy response rates?
- Do you have to contact a lot of clients before you find a brief needing filling?
- Have there been redundancies in your sector recently?
- Do you spend a lot of time taking calls from candidates looking for work?

In this instance, answering 'yes' to these questions suggests you're dealing with a candidate-rich environment. In which case, client attraction is certainly not an issue, so you can begin the recruitment process elsewhere.

Of course, it could be that neither of these two scenarios applies, so it will be down to your own preferred strategy and priorities to determine where to start. There's no right or wrong place to start, just as long as all four stages are covered adequately.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Recruitment Gem Uncovered by Deenita Pattni, 2017.*