FAILING YET AGAIN TO IMPRESS: RECRUITMENT UTILITY ANALYSIS - AN
INNOVATION IMPLEMENTATION

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The research area of recruitment utility analysis (RUA) models has been somewhat unexplored for decades, and has earlier been reduced to simplified mathematic formulas measuring only dollar term value. The need for more dynamic models and theories surrounding the area has been voiced numerous times, yet little has been done. The purpose of this study was to highlight this need to encourage to further research, and to examine the managerial perspective on RUA from a semi explorative perspective. Eight interviews were conducted where the managers received questions concerning the recruitment process and the method used to conduct RUA. The results of this study indicate somewhat unimpressed attitudes toward the added value of conducting RUA. The reasons for not conducting RUA were found to be due to time constraint, lack of skills and managerial support. The majority of the RUA was found to be reactive and based on gut feeling implying a need for proactive RUA hence ensuring the value of the recruitment process.

The number of studies made in the area of recruitment utility analysis (RUA) has been scarce and has for years left practitioners with very few possibilities to make educated statements and implement methods for analysing utility within recruitment processes. Too much emphasis has primarily been put upon simplified mathematic models describing how practitioners can evaluate the recruitment process to ensure the quality and value of it, and a need for a more dynamic definition is definitely needed (Boudreau, Dyer & Rynes, 1996). The need for increased understanding of how important the evaluating part of the process is to monitor cost/benefit within the company is left unsatisfied. To achieve a greater understanding and to spread newfound knowledge we must study a broader range of recruitment activities and measure the outcomes at an organizational level (Barber, 1998).

Research in the area has repeatedly had direct implications for managers. In spite of this there is much left to wish for in the practical adoption of utility analysis methods (Becker & Huselid, 1992). A conclusion drawn from this could be that the difficulty lies in companies and practitioners to start appreciating the importance of maintaining value and benefit through analyzing utility. It is reasonable to assume that if recruitment itself is a consequence of companies’ strive towards constant growth, then recruitment analysis should be included in that framework. It seems somewhat hazardous to leave results unanalyzed, and the development of more sophisticated models calls for sophisticated methods of controlling for utility.
Cascio and Aguinis (2005) state that there are more sophisticated ways of analyzing the utility of recruitment process. The method pointed out by them consists of a thorough division of the different aspects of the process offering the reader one possible way of analyzing utility. The purpose of conducting an analysis of this sort is to break the process down into smaller fragments. This enables efficient analyses of the compartments one by one to differentiate them from one another. It is also a good way in which the company can detect the exact location of a less successful part in the process. Research and practice on the area of evaluation should never be based on a hunch or on unreliable and invalid intuitions.

The main purpose of this study is to explore managers’ attitudes and methods surrounding RUA to clarify the need of further research and practical implications for recruiting practices.

Recruitment utility analysis and the concept of fit
A more differentiated and individualistic labour market forces individuals and organisations to adjust quickly to structural changes. Companies strive towards maximise their profit and growth and attempt to maintain a successful approach towards those receiving the services and products, and the individual needs to ensure his/her position on the labour market. Because of the aforementioned it is no longer favourable to view recruitment practices in a somewhat static matter. On the contrary it is important to realise the need of shifting focus toward the fit between the person/organisation and the person/job and proactive strategies aiming towards prevention of potential misfits.

As industrial societies grew a problem of matching the right employee to the right position arose. There still exists no method with high, guaranteed success-rate. On the contrary the amount of unsuccessful fits is growing. Kalleberg (2008) notes that the reasons for these misfits are changes occurring both in the workplace, but also on a macro level i.e. the institutional structure. Furthermore these changes also include globalisation and the rising of information technology and last but not least a growing diversity in the labour forces (Kalleberg, 2008).
A striving towards finding favourable methods of ensuring fit quickly arose. The reality faced by organisations was and is a financial loss when experiencing a misfit, hence proving it to be essential for the growing organisation to do its best to see to that this does not occur. Positive outcomes are also associated with person-environment fit and individual perceptions and values of the work place (Carless, 2005). One way of defining person-environment fit was offered by Edwards and Shipp is: “...the congruence, fit, similarity, or correspondence between the person and the environment.” (2007, p. 4).

Hesitance towards RUA
There still seems to be hesitance surrounding the area of change toward analysing utility and very little data exists on the matter. This being said, there are indications pointing
toward companies’ hesitance in using utility analysis when there is a fear that the potentially negative results of an analysis might be negatively received in the organisation. When the people responsible for evaluating the recruitment process fear that already scarce resources may diminish as a consequence of the result from the analysis certain hesitance towards evaluation is common (Boudreau et al., 1996). The same authors also found that there was a personal aspect involved and that was whether the participants perceived that they risked being held responsible if they did not in fact achieve the economic value predicted from the analysis (Boudreau et al., 1996). They also stated that managers prefer to be a part of studies exploring more complex models than the simple models brought forward by earlier research. On the other side of that coin we find the companies who are willing to adopt utility analysis applications and strategically implement them in their practices. These can be assumed to be companies with higher turnover levels and growth rates than the ones who are less eager to analyse utility (Boudreau, Dyer & Rynes, 1996).

Twenty-five years ago, Boudreau and Berger (1985) stated that research is needed to fill the void in at that time current utility models because their lack of dynamics and failure to capture the whole perspective of human resource management. Still very little has been done. Cronshaw and Alexander (1985, 1987) state that managers are somewhat unimpressed with selection utility analyses and emphasize the importance of treating selection utility analysis as investment decisions and not only act reactively upon personnel related decisions. Guion and Gibson (1988) agree with the fore mentioned and note that the fact that managers are unimpressed with utility estimates might point toward superior managerial insight. Becker and Gerhart (1996) affiliate with the notion that there is a large distance between research and practice and that the gap between research and policy implementations needs to be narrowed down.

Organizational inertia
The fact that changes are slow in organizations has been a topic surrounded by large interest for many years now. Implementing innovations can be somewhat tedious and does not always come effortlessly. One definition of the construct innovation was stated by Klein, Conn and Sorra (2001) to be “a technology or practice that an organization is using for the first time, regardless whether other organizations have previously used the technology or practice” (p.409). Although the methods and strategies themselves are of utmost importance to succeed in spreading innovations, there are further obstacles to consider. The process of convincing professional individuals that utility analysis is of utmost important is a difficult task. Organisational inertia can possibly count as one of several explanations to why some managers resist enhancing their method or adopting new methods of utility analysis. The logic of this argument is that if one unit changes in the company all units may follow the innovation hence creating a domino effect of change affecting the every-day work life of several sections within the company (Hannan, Pólos & Carroll, 2002). This is a problem that needs to be tackled from different angles to elaborate with different methods for addressing issues of
organisational inertia. If research and practitioners do not develop ways of dealing with these difficulties, little is left to hope for concerning the implementation of change.

**Innovation implementation difficulties**

New methods and strategies, such as recruitment utility analyses, demanding the development and practice of new skills together with the distribution of the innovation downwards and/or sideward in the organisation may face certain difficulties. Implementing innovation in an organisation has thus proven to not always be an easy task. Research has shown that the foundation of a possibly successful implementation of innovation in a great part lies in the foundation of the organisational climate. According to Schneider (1975) this climate consists of a number of factors combined, creating more or less favourable circumstances and opportunities of implementing innovations. Schneider’s definition of an organisational climate consists of the employees’ perceptions of situations, processes and practices that have proven to be rewarded, expected and supported in a given context (Schneider, 1975). Schneider extends this definition by stressing that it is the shared perceptions of the work environment amongst employees, and also to what magnitude the situations, processes and practices are rewarded, expected and supported.

There can be limitations to the implementation climate. Innovation-values-fit is an indication of these potential limitations. If the innovation in question is perceived by members of the organisation to have a poor fit with the values and goals of the organisation at large, a strong implementation climate will not be enough grounds to enable a successful implementation of an innovation (Klein & Sorra, 1996).

There are also other factors to consider as to why an organisational innovation succeeds or fails. As stated by Klein and Sorra (1996): “An organization’s failure to achieve the intended benefits of an innovation it has adopted may thus reflect either a failure of implementation or a failure of the innovation itself.” (p.1055). The authors of the aforementioned study also claim that there are two prerequisites for successful implementations. Although structurally separated these two interact and are according to the two authors interdependent. These two are Climate for implementation and Innovations-value fit. Interlinked with the organisational climate are skills possessed by the members in the organisation, incentives and disincentives and absence of obstacles. To be able to proceed after establishing that there is in fact an innovation-values-fit between the organisation and its member and the innovation itself, commitment is of utmost importance. These aforementioned factors lay the foundation of the success of an innovation and an effective implementation which in turn leads to innovation effectiveness with strategic accuracy of innovation adoption as a mediator. (Klein & Sorra, 1996).

Nord and Tucker (1987) noted that innovation implementation reaches the greatest success when the organisations are able to provide the resources necessary for training
employees and hire consultants. Nord and Tucker also stress the organisational need to lower expectations concerning performance during the time of implementation thus highlighting the need for financial resources to achieve a successful implementation. To perform these tasks the need of managerial support must not be diminished. As stated by Leonard-Barton and Kraus (1985), managerial support is a great force in implementing and nurturing implementation policies and practices. On a similar note, Klein et al (2001) declare that highly committed managers tend to invest more time and effort into monitoring the quality of the implementation policies and practices. This being said, managerial commitment is as important as employee commitment. An overview of the area surrounding the notion of innovations-value fit provides the reader with an understanding as to how employees actually can decelerate innovation implementation. These targeted users of the innovation, may choose not to nurture the implementation if they perceive that it collides with their own values, thus preventing a successful implementation of the innovation (Klein, Conn & Sorra, 2001).

Evidently there are many aspects to consider and investigate concerning the area of recruitment utility analysis. To successfully implement the innovation RUA is perceived to be it is essential to begin with the managers in charge of spreading information downwards and side-wards in the organisation. In order to accomplish something which in 25 years has not succeeded, it is vital to get to the core of managerial attitudes surrounding the area to be able to understand the evident hesitance towards potentially invaluable methods of securing and evaluating recruitment processes.

The purpose of this study is to examine the methods of large companies concerning recruitment utility analysis and the representatives’ attitudes towards the same. Also this study emphasises if and why companies might be reluctant to change routines and practices surrounding RUA. The second purpose of this current study is last but not least to highlight the need of further research in the area of utility analysis and also to attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice through investigating what organisations do to analyse the utility of the recruitment process and the attitudes surrounding the concept.

Method

Participants and procedure
Eight companies were selected from www.allabolag.se and the company representatives were initially contacted by telephone. Those who requested so received an e-mail containing further information before deciding whether or not to participate. The participants were also informed about the general purpose of the study: Investigating how and if companies analyse the utility of the recruitment process and if not – the primary reasons for not doing so. The selected respondents were managers with recruitment and personnel responsibilities or individuals who have had several years of experience from the recruitment business. The mean experience in recruiting in years was 18, 6 years and all of the respondents had a university diploma.
The criteria for participation in the study were also that the companies handled recruitment and selection at large within the company. Emphasis in selecting respondents was also laid on large scale companies with a great number of employees both nationally and internationally. The eight companies had a mean number of 13,919 employees and ranged from industries such as retail and health care to banking and financing.

The respondents were informed about confidentiality and anonymity and also that the interview was going to be recorded. They also received information about the approximate length of the interview which at the time was estimated to 30-60 minutes. The company representatives were interviewed individually on average for 30 minutes. Before the interview everyone received a form to fill in where they were asked to fill in sex, position in the organisation, experience in recruiting (in years), educational level, total number of employees, type of industry, whether or not they analyse recruitment utility and if they did not – the primary reasons for not doing so. Since all of the eight respondents answered that they do analyse recruitment utility, the last question was not accounted for. Instead the above mentioned question was interpreted out of the respondents’ answers in the interviews and facets of whether they analyse the utility of the recruitment process were categorized and detected, adding to the value of that important dimension.

One of the eight interviews failed to be recorded and a summary was sent via email to the respondent with a request to fill in the gaps and return the email as a sign of approval of what was written in the summary. The email was never returned resulting in a total of seven final respondents included in this study. An internal missing quality aspect in one of the interviews was the fact that one participant considered the company’s specific method of RUA to be a competitive advantage and was therefore reluctant to share detailed information about their strategies.

**Analysis**

When collecting the interview data all respondents were asked to fill in a form. This form was labelled with the same number as the interview file with the recorded interview. This file was thereby transferred to a computer to enable the transcription. The programme “Express Scribe” (http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/) was downloaded as a resource in transcribing the data which enabled the author to slow down the interview which in turn facilitated the transcription of the interviews. If the respondents mentioned the company’s name or anything else that would compromise the anonymity or confidentiality of the respondent or the company he/she represented, this was removed when transcribed. After the transcription the files were deleted from the computer.

The interviews were transcribed word-for-word and subjected to an open coding. The first review of the data consisted of the initial semi-structured coding. One example of
the coding procedure is the finding on the topic of managerial support and feedback routines within the organisation. When analysing the material, certain concepts interpreted as support and feedback were found to be “conversations”, “feedback”, “consultation” and “discussion” all of which were connected to some form of throwback routine or procedure. An inductive thematic analysis (Langemar, 2008) was conducted hence the search for theoretical support for the findings in the interviews was conducted parallel to the analysis of the data material. After the initial coding the data material was reduced into more narrow headings. The material was subjected to several revisions to ensure correct interpretations and coding.

Findings

The main themes arising from data were incentives, obstacles, method of recruitment utility analysis and feedback loop and support. The incentives were found to be divided into explicitly perceived/subjective incentives and the ones interpreted by the author, also titled implicit or objective. The reason for some incentives being interpreted as implicit was simply that they were not in fact stated clearly in affiliation with questions surrounding RUA but simply a smaller part of another statement on another topic.

Some opinions were uttered in another context than the direct questions surrounding RUA and were therefore interpreted as implicit incentives because of their tacit nature. Other incentives were however in direct relation to the questions concerning methods of RUA and were therefore placed under the category explicit incentives.

Implicit incentives

There is great value to be found in evaluating past recruitment decisions to see whether they were successful or not, not only to ensure a good start for new employees. This in turn enables companies to attract the right candidates and also to retain them. There is a positive lesson to be learned from the good examples as opposed to telling horror stories about potentially hazardous recruitment decisions. Successful examples have a tendency to spread and have a more positive impact.

Web-based solutions are becoming more popular by the minute. One way of conducting RUA was expressed to be through a web-based form evaluating recruitment channels. However, the purpose of such a form is to investigate the best possible places to find their candidates, but mentions that it does not work the way it is supposed to. It was also noted that the search aiming towards employing the perfect employee sometimes hinders the everyday working life of managers in selecting good candidates because first middle managers do not realise the value of employing someone with potential to grow and develop within the structure of the organisation: “One never wants to accept the possible disadvantages.”. It was also expressed that the process just is expected to work smoothly and quickly. This could be interpreted as a strong incentive for analysing recruitment utility to investigate the reason for this miscommunication between middle managers and the Human Resource managers (HR-managers). On the same note it was
expressed that a poor recruitment may well be the result of the managers responsible for recruitment not being clear enough about employee expectations and what is included in that specific position, prior to the employment. It was also aired that an improved administrative system is needed enabling an overview as to where in the recruitment process an applicant is situated at one specific moment. The reason for this being to enhance professionalism and not risking calling an applicant twice for a similar type of meeting just because the company lacks administrative routines.

Explicit incentives
It was generally perceived to be of greater importance to analyse the utility of the recruitment process when it concerns managerial positions. The reasons for this were expressed to be that if the company was to wrongly recruit a manager, this person might negatively affect several units and is also more difficult to remove of transfer. On another note, analysis of recruitment utility is conducted when the outcome has been particularly favourable.

If in the midst of implementing new strategies and methods for analysing and enhancing recruitment utility, it can be valued as important for HR-managers to refine the methods used and to lift them onto a new level. The implementation of change seems to be so self-evident in the every-day life of the organisation that several HR-managers have not experienced any resistance per se to innovation implementation per se. On the contrary, innovations have been highly requested because of the growing apprehension that failed recruitments increase costs and are very time-consuming.

Many incentives as to why it is perceived to be important to analyse utility rose from the data collected. Some considered their activities to be somewhat fragmented adding to the value of conducting RUA since the recruitment process needs tightening to work successfully. Another strong incentive mentioned was the high number of managerial turnover which contributes to a natural understanding as to why it is necessary to overlook the process. Also emerging from the interviews was the importance of placing the right person in the right position to reach certain levels of efficiency. A constant strive towards improving the recruitment process also might simplify newcomers’ organisational socialisation and enable the individual to “do it right directly”. It was also mentioned that there is enormous profit in monetary value to gain from RUA.

Personality and traits may have an impact on whether or not a manager chooses to entail in structured RUA’s. Two of the respondents distinguished themselves concerning level of engagement in RUA. Whether this is a consequence of areas of interest or a constant striving towards superiority can be further discussed. One respondent clearly stated that most importantly it is a matter of personality and constantly believing that the organisation can evolve and become better and more competent, and also an intrinsic motivational force within the respondent – wanting to become a better professional. Another dimension on the same issue was expressed by one respondent. The company representative argued that the company was very hesitant toward revealing their
methods and strategies surrounding RUA due to the fact that they considered it to be a competitive advantage.

**Obstacles**

All company representatives were asked whether they experienced any resistance from the management concerning the time and resources necessary to thoroughly analyse the utility of the recruitment process. On that note it was vented that no direct resistance had been perceived, however it was also noted that it would be unnecessary and time consuming to fill in too many evaluation forms. The logic here being that the organisational member responsible for this task would not show the respect the evaluation needs and only complete it to get it over with.

There appears to be a certain amount of hesitance surrounding the evaluation of different aspects of the recruitment process among the companies included in this study. For example it was mentioned that the advertisement used to attract good candidates and the fact that the utility or how sufficient it is cannot in fact be evaluated. However later on, on the same it was expressed that it is possible to evaluate whether or not the company has targeted the right candidates through the advertisement thus creating one dynamic to analyse. This indicates that managers simply do not know exactly how to measure the utility of the different aspects of the recruitment process hence a shortage of skills preventing them from conducting detailed and structured utility analyses.

Aspects that may add to the slow pace of implementing strategies for analysing recruitment utility might include sufficiently clear structures together with vaguely delegated responsibilities. It was expressed that middle managers sometimes are responsible for making the recruiting decisions, however the HR-manager had great influence over which candidate was finally selected. One candidate was often emphasised and sometimes expressions like: “I think you should select this one!” occur, leaving the line manager with the final words “but then again, it is your decision”. In this light, it may be relevant to ask whether middle managers would go against a superior manager’s wishes. Another thing that potentially slows the process down was expressed to be labour unions. Their demands of proper insight in the recruitment process were by one representative perceived to be an obstacle in finishing a selection process in a reasonable amount of time.

One factor contributing to not conducting structured utility analyses has been interpreted to be time constraint. Shortage of time, shortage in resources and personnel shortage can be assumed to fall under the same category since all of them transfer resources from production to more sophisticated methods of RUA. This aspect was confirmed in this study, although not directly expressed. Instead it was interpreted from the data material. In some cases an irritation could be sensed concerning inquires of documentation routines. Emotional outbursts like “we are not some b***y county council” were encountered, and expressions of such that although the company does not document the process of recruiting, they form an opinion about the progress of the candidate. The information a company can gather after recruiting an employee was not considered by some to be very valuable. This together with the notion that the
recruitment process already is a time consuming process must create a sense of unwillingness among managers in further expanding their responsibilities and commitments. This being said a poor recruitment will add to the work load of these managers, which was confirmed by several participants. These consequences of poor recruitments have also been expressed to be larger when the candidate occupies a managerial position. The importance of successful recruitments when the position in question works close to customers was stressed by several respondents.

Although the main body concur with the amount of time documenting would imply, most of the participants agree upon the potential gains of this structured documentation. It was stated that could be favourable to document the RUA to be able to “secure backwards, what did we do, what didn’t we do.[...] But it’s a lot...we do not have the time, unfortunately.”.

It was expressed that one reason for organisations moving very slowly (organisational inertia) may well be the fact that organisational members of today are bombarded with information, thus making it essential for managers to “shoot from many different angles” when presenting and implementing innovations, as one participant stated. The same person believed that not all of the managers in the organisation realise the importance of working towards an amelioration of the recruitment process. This might be due to shortage of time and not an indication of nonchalance towards the concept.

Managers may simply perceive that they have other, more pressing obligations. As before mentioned shortage of time together with other aspect of managers’ work load seem to be a reason for not further elaborating with the RUA. It was uttered that sometimes the process of recruiting is too long and it becomes difficult to find the right candidate for a certain position. This acts as a contribution to the fact that that specific company accepts issues they normally would not such as demands that has been agreed upon as minimum cut off levels and employ a candidate on a questionable level. According to several respondents, this happens when the recruitment and selections process is expected to go faster than recommended.

Another obstacle worth mentioning is the one described by two of the respondents. They expressed that implementing innovations in other countries where the culture differs from the Swedish culture can often be a challenging task. The reason for this was said to be in part because of the difference in the relationship between employer and employee abroad, but also the fact that certain values are not as valued in other countries as they are in Sweden.

The results of this study have shown that there is a general perception among managers that it is impossible to evaluate every part of the recruitment process:

We can’t have gigantic business ratios because when we ask our employees to fill out a form for evaluation, we have to be able to deal with all of the answers in that form [...]. If we ask too many questions we just increase expectations and then nothing happens.
Method of recruitment utility analysis

One way of analysing the utility of the recruitment process was through performance reviews where one organisation recently had implemented a clear and structured method of a performance follow-up. On this note it was stated that educating and training all managers within the company in analysing the utility of performance amongst employees lies in the near future. Checklists were also utilised in the introductory period. When asked about the documentation routines of the recruitment utility analyses, opinions were divided. One respondent stated that the organisation he/she represented definitely have plans to further document the utility analyses because of the applicability in finding the best possible candidates and also to prevent the company from having to repeatedly invent the wheel. Documentation was furthermore perceived as too time consuming due to the fact that it could be included in the performance management strategies.

Amongst other perceptions concerning structured RUA offering a possible explanation for managers not following through with documentation and routines was argued to be the general apprehension of finding the start up phase more providing than a zealous follow up. It was even expressed by one respondent to be “fun” to start up and “boring” to follow up.

Using gut feeling in making important strategic decisions has been an arising topic worthy of attention and may be a target for further criticism since there is no researched or documented proof that the method is a reliable support in selecting competent employees. It was argued that if a company receives signals of a very successful recruitment, the people responsible for the recruitment process would reflect upon how that specific recruitment was conducted, with a great reliance on reactive analyses instead of a proactive approach. It was hence aired that representatives do not in fact analyse every element of the process proactively but base the decision to analyse utility on a gut feeling and as a reaction of a fortunate recruitment. It was also stated that the usage of gut feeling also is applied when checking the candidates’ credentials. One respondent stressed the importance of accounting for gut feeling when signals are indicating that something is not right.

Several other pronouncements on the topic of reactive rather than proactive recruitment utility analysis indicate a feeling of analysing utility through evaluating the introductory period. Several companies stated that utility analysis was conducted 3-4 months into the employment through and evaluation of whether or not the introduction went according to plan. This mentioned it is important to highlight the statement of one respondent:

It is very important not to just work reactively - Oops he/she is leaving! Someone just happens to walk by and you take the first one even if he/she isn’t necessary the best one, without conducting a structured process with a proactive perspective.

To specify the different sections of the recruitment process but not to evaluate them one by one seems fairly common. This being said the perception among managers is in spite of this that they do in fact conduct RUA. The standardisation of the recruitment process
and the development of a framework from which all companies can derive useful information and guidelines for analysing its utility would greatly simplify the matter. It was ventured that it would enable comparisons of processes to see whether actions point in a favourable way towards the applicant. However, it was also expressed that a much too standardised framework seems impossible to achieve: “In a sense it is in fact the human being we are after [...] and how do you standardise an attitude?” It was also stated that the final decision in most cases is based upon the recruiting manager’s perception of the applicant’s attitude and that this aspect of selection is a very hard one to standardise. This being said there seems to be a need for further structuring RUA procedures and one suggestion was for organisations to entail in a project where every momentum in the recruitment process is dealt with.

To be able to successfully implement innovations there have been indications of importance lying in targeting a critical group. These critical groups can consist of managers/employees who have closely experienced the catastrophic consequences of a failed recruitment process. These employees are also the easiest to motivate towards innovations. If the organisation is able to gather a critical group such as the aforementioned, rumour can play an enormous part in a potentially successful innovation implementation.

In order to ensure that all units in an organisation become a part of potentially auspicious methods of analysing utility of the recruitment process, there are different methods to apply to organisational practices. One method was the observation of a particularly favourable strategy leading to cross-fertilisation of that strategy with other units, thus taking advantage of the fact that the method already has been tested and proceed to implement these in all units concerned. Another strategy is to employ people who are in fact open for structural changes. Even though resistance to change can offer a certain sense of security there can: “lie a false sense of security in not changing at all”. The solution for a successful implementation of the innovation, in this case RUA, is to employ the people best suited for that specific organisation.

Another perceived way of handling the analysis of recruitment utility is through improvement groups. This strategy was stated not as something isolated and belonging only to the recruitment process but in fact something that was born in production and manufacturing in that specific company. This method was later on adopted by the people responsible for the recruitment process as a way of controlling for the company’s external profiling and accessibility. The suggestions this group compile are then presented to a steering committee which in turn makes the formal decision to implement the suggestion. The final formal decisions are, if approved by the steering committee, transformed into forms and/or routines. This same respondent stated that it is generally perceived to be easier to analyse utility in production units due to the fact that it is easier to keep track of the amount of produced goods. “It is easier to follow up..than just sporadic processes because of the many possible factors at play as to why it has become like this or like that...”. This statement indicates ignorance as to what factors are at play
in other units’ success concerning recruitment and should be highlighted and studied further.

Feedback loop and support

One area of interest in this current study was to investigate the managerial support-system during the recruitment process. The findings in the interviews indicate that HR-managers seldom unaided reach decisions about phases in the recruitment process and most often is offered or seek the support and feedback from the recruiting manager. One important aspect of having the recruiting manager’s support was that he/she can “smell the applicant” to see whether that person has the knowledge, skills, abilities and personality necessary for the position being filled. Another way of expressing this was that the recruiting manager and the HR-manager work as “stable-mates”. It was articulated that recruitment utility analysis (RUA) is not something that the upper management is involved in, on the contrary, it was stated that the upper management just expects the RUA to be conducted properly and that the upper management has more important issues to consider: “There are a lot of things that are just expected to work smoothly”.

In most cases, not surprisingly, the recruiting manager owns the recruitment being conducted. In other words the manager closest to the position being filled is the one responsible for the recruitment. On this note it was stated that the reason for this arrangement has been a consequence of middle managers not accepting the HR department just sending a candidate over and would most likely express discontent with a decision being made “over their heads”. The company representative in question also note that this decision is one surrounded with a great deal of anguish since they are the ones who will have to pay the price in the case of a poor recruitment decision. However, in one specific case included in this study the line manager has the possibility of receiving feedback from the HR-manager with an overall responsibility for the recruitment processes and HR-related decisions made in the company.

The importance of feedback cannot be diminished according to one participant. This respondent stressed the importance of trust to achieve the best possible feedback. This notion was agreed upon by several others included in this study thus indicating that teamwork is essential in recruitment practices of today.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore managers’ methods of RUA and also the attitudes surrounding the implementation of the same. The need for further research was aired and also a will to bridge the gap between research and practice through investigating perceptions surrounding the area of RUA.

The organisational climate has been shown to contribute to stronger possibilities of innovation implementation (Klein & Sorra, 1996). The authors of the aforementioned report also stressed the notion of values-fit in enabling innovations to spire. Innovation-Value-fit was described as the extent to which the members of an organisation perceive a concurrence between the value of the innovation and the values of the organisation.
This seems reasonable to assume, although one problem area remains. The larger issue surrounding recruitment utility analysis has for years indicated a disinterest among managers (Cronshaw & Alexander, 1985) concerning practices adjacent to RUA. In spite of attempts made by several researchers, not much has been done twenty-five years later to offer sufficient and standardised solutions for practitioners. The results of the current study signal several indications. The first finding support the research made by Cronshaw and Alexander in 1985. Managers represented in this study still do not fully admit to the possible added value in conducting structured RUA. All managers participating in this study perceived that they do in fact conduct RUA, but the question still remains why the main body feel that the only way is to conduct ad hoc and reactive utility analyses.

This being said, a minority of the sample did in fact stress the importance of continuous and proactive RUA indicating a growing insight among certain company representatives. To only conduct RUA when the outcome is favourable is assumedly intertwined with great risk. This posits a threat to companies’ resources and suggests a somewhat nonchalant laissez-faire attitude towards the potential hazards of working reactive. An assumption to be made from this is that successful companies in the future not only are the ones working closely and thoroughly with customer relations and profit gain, but are in fact prominent in improving their recruitment processes with a foundation of true understanding of the consequences of a reactive perspective.

Boudreau, Dyer and Rynes (1996) found that the companies who were in fact willing to strategically impute RUA were also the ones with high turnover rates and growth levels. Their finding gained support in this current study. The companies indicating that they did in fact conduct detailed, proactive and structured RUA were also representatives of companies with very high growth levels. Arising from data was also the fact that managers who merely analysed utility through a discussion with the recruiting manager or through an evaluation form stated that they perceived RUA to be valuable since they had high managerial turnover rates. Included amongst the strategies of these companies were to use critical groups/individuals as an aid in implementing the innovation. The thought behind this method was that the managers with experience of potentially hazardous recruitments could engage and motivate other employees and managers due to his/her insight in latent consequences embedded in a badly structured recruitment process.

Investigating the effect managerial support and upper management resistance to innovations such as RUA, the results of this study indicate that managers do not experience resistance per se. However true, this finding does not tell us that managers are generally supportive, instead the finding indicate that there is a sense of delegating the responsibility downwards and just expecting it to work smoothly thereafter. This attitude can cause great damage to the implementation climate since another important aspect of successful implementations is managerial support (Leonard-Barton & Kraus, 1985). Klein et al (2001) offer another explanation as to why proactive RUA fail to be implemented. On the same note, highly committed managers tend to engage more in the
implementation of innovations. This is consistent with the results of this study and posits an addition to the development of models of RUA. A minority of the respondents expressed that it is of utmost importance to work proactively with the recruitment process. The notion emerging from data that the upper management just expects the recruitment process in whole to run smoothly can indicate a lack of managerial support in certain companies, something that has been shown to be of importance in implementing innovations (Leonard-Barton & Kraus, 1985).

Contributing to the innovation implementation climate are the skills possessed by the people in charge of the practical implementation, incentives and disincentives and the absence of obstacles. And interacting with these are innovations-value-fit and the commitment necessary to successfully proceed with the implementation (Klein & Sorra, 1996). The findings indicate that managers lack the skills necessary to conduct valid and reliable RUA. As mentioned before Nord and Tucker (1987) found that in order to successfully implement innovations, it is essential to provide the training and resources needed by the managers. In order to reach the point where structured RUA is seen as a self-evident part of the organisational life, more emphasis has to be put on making sure that managers possess the skills and support needed to proceed with a constant and continuous improvement of the recruitment process.

On the issue of incentives there seems to be a dividing of subjective and objective incentives. The objective being the implicit incentives embedded within the organisational structures and the explicit incentives being the openly aired and perceived by the managers for conducting RUA and the subjective. The question whether this is in fact implicit or explicit amongst managers arises. Are managers not aware of all possible incentives for conducting utility analyses? If they are not, it is clear that further training and education concerning the clear advantages of developed models is greatly needed. Thus a lack of know-how in sophisticated and statistically accurate RUA was presented in data as a lack of control when reaching the evaluation phase. This could be read between the lines from the quotation on page nine. A perception of the gains in only analysing the utility of smaller pieces could be gathered indicating a fear of promising too much and not being able to follow through. On the note of skills and using gut feeling in making recruitment decisions interact with each other. As mentioned above, skills for conducting innovations are necessary for ensuring a successful implementation therefore skills concerning RUA are necessary for conducting it in a favourable manner.

An issue brought to mind when conducting this study and analysing the results was the fact that many companies, due to the widespread outsourcing climate on the market do not in core own their recruitment process and that this fact may contribute to the notion that RUA is not prioritised. This can in fact effectively pose a threat to the development of more sophisticated methods of utility analyses. The logic here is that keeping a recruiting team within the organisation is the result of a strategic decision and risk being reconsidered at any time. The alternative decision of hiring and external recruitment and
staffing companies lies close to the organisation which in turn can be assumed to contribute to a potential unwillingness of further developing methods of RUA.

The time constraint expressed by several to be a reason for not further analysing recruitment utility is another interesting dynamic of this study. This indicates that unwillingness to further document the recruitment process and reluctance to evaluating and analysing every part of the process in fact might be a consequence of resource scarcity. The attitudes found amongst the managers in this study indicate that the added value RUA imply has not won positive appraisal and a lot of work lies ahead both for researchers and practitioner in order to be able to expose different companies’ recruitment processes to competition.

Limitations and strengths

There are a few limitations to take into account concerning the validity of this study. One major limitation is closely related to limitations connected to self report forms and the risk of not answering truthfully but instead the respondent answering in a by him/her perceived or expected manner. The fact that awareness surrounding RUA is growing in the business world, a sense is developing among practitioners that the improvement of the recruitment process is considered by many to be of great importance. When the respondents were subjected to questions, both direct and indirect, most of them seemed to dig deep into their cognitive archives searching for practices which might be considered to be included in an RUA. Interconnected with this aforementioned aspect is the fact that many practitioners have a feeling that conducting RUA is valued by the academic world hence creating reluctance towards admitting to not conducting RUA in a structured way. The fact of the matter is that the findings in this study clearly indicate a majority of non-structured reactive attitudes towards the question area.

Aside from obvious complications, there are also certain strengths to consider. Since the participants were all HR-representatives from medium to large sized companies it can be assumed that the findings and attitudes can be generalised to other HR-managers in other companies. This being said, further investigations are needed to verify this statement.

The research area in this current study is suitable for qualitative studies such as this one. This is in fact an area where change is expected and therefore the results cannot be presumed to apply historically or in the future. The attitudes found are therefore concurrent in their characteristics and further research is needed to measure change in perceptions, attitudes and methods of RUA. This being said, the findings in this study can presume to have value in generalising towards concurrent HR-managers in different industries since the representatives were participants from different sectors hence a concurrent correspondence between data and reality.

Furthermore it should be added to the discussion that there lies an innate difficulty in constructing an interview guide when so little research has been conducted. With hindsight it was however possible to withdraw useful information from the interviews
and the amount of data and the qualitative differences amongst the respondents was satisfying leaving a perception of data saturation.

The meaningfulness of the findings is evidently dependent on who chooses to take part of the results. The findings indicate certain attitudes surrounding RUA, an indication leaving managers and companies with indications of the added value of a structured RUA.

Future research
The value of observational studies is great in studies concerning methods of dealing with managerial tasks and the congruence (or discrepancy) between managerial perceptions and objective facts. However true this is, time and resources are scarce commodities and therefore studies like these are seldom encountered. Research would in spite of this benefit from more sophisticated and standardised methods of measuring strategies surrounding the recruitment process to be able to compare different companies or blocks as an attempt of developing one uniform best-practice method of both working with the recruitment process and the analysis of its utility.

Another interesting aspect of this study worthy of further investigation is the one mentioned under Discussion that the fact that the decision of hiring external recruitment and staffing companies can contribute to the sense of the organisation not really owning its recruitment process is something that might point towards an attitude arising as a consequence of structural changes on the labour market.

Practical implications
The initiative to conduct structured utility analyses adds a value to HR-practices and more specifically the recruitment process. Although the need of a model for working proactively with recruitment decisions in general, the need is growing for a model that not only focuses on the aforementioned, but also on methods of ensuring the quality of the recruitment process. One way of implementing this change in focus is through governmental projects which not only can offer proper training but can also achieve an attitudinal change amongst employers, in time leading towards RUA gaining approval on a broader spectrum.

References


