

**FORGET
EVERYTHING
YOU KNOW
ABOUT**

RECRUIT

A group of ten diverse people are standing in front of the large red word 'RECRUIT'. They are in various poses: some are giving thumbs up, some are striking playful poses, and one is wearing a Spider-Man mask. The people are of various ages and ethnicities, dressed in casual to semi-formal attire.

Some turned up in whatever they threw on that day; others were dressed to the nines in a desperate attempt to impress. When you're going to end your day impersonating the 'ultimate rack of ribs' in front of complete strangers, it must be hard to know quite what to pick out of the wardrobe.

And the stakes were high. More than 300 plucky candidates had gathered at the National Space Centre in Leicester, to compete for 80 coveted front of house, kitchen and bar positions at the newly opened TGI Friday's store in the city centre, as *People Management* looked on. Hiring managers knew what they were after: the 'Friday's feeling'. The fact that the process occurred in the middle of the week was irrelevant – come the end of two gruelling days, candidates would know whether their menu-based impersonations, dance routines and gift of the gab had landed them a job.

Jacqui McManus, the nationwide restaurant chain's director of culture and people development, is clear that every aspect of its recruitment activity is a means to an end. "We are not looking for average people who want to work in hospitality. We are looking for extraordinary people who have a huge appetite to care, connect

with and entertain our guests," she says. "This doesn't always come across in a traditional interview – we want to see applicants be themselves and let their personalities shine.

"We don't see what we do as 'zany' necessarily. We need the applicants to be relaxed and feel safe with us – it's only then that we are able to get to see their potential. Each activity has its own unique purpose; some are looking to identify a creative streak, others are around identifying team players."

TGI's activities would have once been lauded as boundary-pushing. But the reality is that the days of the traditional recruitment process are numbered. Today, organisations are adopting highly specialised, targeted methods at every level to ensure the best talent crosses the threshold. The logic is unassailable: the workforce has changed rapidly over the past couple of decades, as has the nature of work. We expect employees to be flexible, collaborative and innovative. Why would we recruit them using methods that emerged a century ago and have been consistently derided as outdated ever since?

The economic case is equally easy to make. One in 10 new recruits is considered a 'poor hiring decision'

according to a 2015 survey from Robert Half, and this is expensive: the average cost of replacing a staff member is £30,614, according to Oxford Economics.

Although employers have been slow to catch on, countless studies have shown that interviews – even the unstructured kind favoured by tech firms – are one of the worst predictors of how a person will perform in a job. "Interviews work better when there is clarity on the content to be covered," says Clodagh O'Reilly, chair of the Association for Business Psychology. "A lot of organisations' job design is not necessarily in touch with the day-to-day reality, so interviews are often conducted based on content that is outdated."

The unstructured interview is also a breeding ground for bias, argues Jonny Gifford, research adviser at the CIPD. Having a prearranged game plan prior to meeting a candidate is the only way to counteract it, employing the best scientific evidence available. "There is a growing sense that advances in behavioural science, cognitive psychology, behavioural economics, and social neuroscience are hugely relevant to understanding bias in the recruitment process and determining future performance," he says. "If we look

The days of the interview are numbered. But you might be surprised just how far some organisations are prepared to go for fresh talent

WORDS GRACE LEWIS



“Having too much data can introduce a different kind of bias to recruitment”

at heuristics – the idea that we make mental shortcuts, and look for easy routes to quick conclusions – the old indicators of what ‘good’ looks like can often cloud our judgement of potential talent.”

Competency-based interviews and tests are supposed to give an indication as to how a candidate will perform in a role. But how accurate – and fair – is the old maxim that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour?

“If you’re female and you’ve had two lots of maternity leave in a period of five years, the amount of performance I can judge you on is limited compared to your male colleagues. You are automatically at a disadvantage,” says Ann Pickering, HR director of O2. “Similarly, for talent joining straight from school, when have they had a chance to ‘show leadership’ or ‘deal with a difficult customer’?”

Aiming to create a level playing field, Pickering’s team changed how the telecoms firm assessed performance. “We look at people’s potential; their judgement, drive and influence,” she says. That means an online psychometric test – conducted on an iPad to simultaneously determine a candidate’s tech-savviness – followed by a blind, structured interview. “By asking our managers to interview without a CV, or prior information, it creates a very different conversation.

The trick is to make sure your managers are skilled in that conversation.”

The completed application forms that each potential TGI’s recruit started the recruitment day with may have formed initial impressions in the hiring managers’ minds, but first impressions don’t always last, says McManus. Though many of the recruiters in Leicester expressed an early preference for certain candidates based on a combination of CV and first impressions, there were notable changes of mind as the day progressed.

Interviewing isn’t over, of course. Standard Chartered, Barclays, Nestlé and Royal Mail all favour strengths-based interviews in their graduate recruitment process, reasoning that employees who undertake work they are passionate about will be more productive and motivated.

“You need to consider not only what the candidate has achieved and can do, but who they are and if they are going to want to continue to do what is required of them to succeed,” says O’Reilly. Questions such as: What are you good at? What subjects do you enjoy learning? Describe a successful day you’ve had? can reveal pre-existing behavioural traits that could determine whether a candidate is suited to the organisation.

With 70 per cent of HR directors admitting in a recent Robert Half survey that they had hired someone who didn’t meet expectations, the winning hand in the game of recruitment is determining a candidate’s long-term ‘fit’, something that is hard to predict with a simple one-on-one interview. For O’Reilly, “individuals’ potential to add value in roles within organisations is founded on a combination of innate capacities and learned capabilities.”

“One type of testing that is particularly good at predicting future fit and performance is that which looks at critical reasoning,” says Gifford. That involves a set of questions designed to test your ability to analyse logical arguments. “All employees need to use their discernment – we all need to make evidence-based decisions and sometimes

instinctive judgements in life, and within the job.”

Plenty of online services, both paid-for and free, will offer a suite of packages with sample interview questions, but O’Reilly warns: “You can’t get precise and contextually appropriate outcomes to the same extent with generic programmes.” When recruiting for the best in today’s labour market, personal, bespoke solutions are easier to manage and more effective.

Though big data is often overstated, this may be where it can add genuine value, says Dean Shoesmith, joint executive head of HR at the London Boroughs of Sutton and Merton. When he embarked on a shared services model of recruitment with a number of other London councils, it was evident that the role of the recruitment agent was evolving. “Things like typesetting and even creative advertising were all possible through a software product,” he says.

Under the Local Government Recruitment Partnership (LGRP), the bulk of the recruitment budget now goes into market research and trends analysis, Shoesmith says, which allows for a more targeted approach. “We do research out on the streets, we make contact with community groups, we use a range of data, including applicant tracking systems... even tracking people by postcodes. You can actually see the postcodes congregating on the map in

More than 1,000 people queued for 40 jobs at Aldi in Dudley, the latest example of over-subscribed openings



Meet the contenders

People Management followed four candidates through the TGI Friday's recruitment process

Wesley

"Standing in front of a panel of hiring managers was really nerve-wracking, although I was able to crack a joke about the fact that the dice I was pitching matched the colour of my hair, which seemed to go down well," says Wesley, who seemed shy at first but blossomed during team-building games. He

seemed a little flustered when asked about the best customer service he had received during "speed chats". Candidates were asked to split into groups and come up with their own ideal restaurant: making an immediate grab for the pen on each table was a no-no (it could indicate pushiness), but Wesley steered clear of the stationery until the appropriate time.

Hannah C

Currently waitressing at an indoor bowls club, Hannah scored highly for her appreciation of the TGI's brand. She admitted she was delighted the restaurant was opening in her home city at last: "When I found out they were hiring, I knew I had to see if I had what it takes. TGI's is known for its positive and enthusiastic attitude towards service." It was obvious recruiters liked her from the start: Hannah scored highly on her application form and showed personality in her responses. As a student, she was attracted by the store's flexibility on hours, but was willing and able to work crucial evening and weekend shifts.

Candidates were put through their paces in a series of tests over two gruelling days...



... though even the most apparently frivolous had a specific purpose in the process

a particular pattern, along a travel corridor, which means we can invest in things like open days, ambient advertising, recruitment posters at bus stops, or in local community groups." The results are being felt widely: today, more than 30 different councils are benefiting from savings of an average £1.5 million per year through collaboration.

But Gifford sounds a note of caution on data. "There is a danger that you introduce another type of bias if you've got too much information," he says. "Different recruiting managers may favour some data over others." Having different people involved in the analysis of data, the recruitment process and the comparison of results could be a considered way of tackling this.

For Barbara Becker, chief HR officer at chocolate manufacturer Barry Callebaut, today's recruitment market is a world away from when she first started her career, when traditional sourcing techniques would take weeks and even months at a time. "Now, with the right software, you can do it in an hour's work and you have the first applications within 20 minutes," she says. In 2014, Becker's team adopted a multi-posting tool named Broadbean, which allows her local HR



Lyndell

Lyndell turned up to the talent showcase cool, calm and collected – and while he remained reserved, he got the room laughing during the audition stage. Asked to pitch a product, he chose a toy robot claw that would give the user bionic strength. “To be honest, there was nothing really challenging about the interview,” he says. “It was really fun and informal. I think because we started with some silly icebreaker games, everyone was pretty relaxed throughout the day.” He certainly won over the crowd (at one point, a hiring manager whispered: “If we don’t hire him, I’m resigning.”) Even revealing a little more personal information about his recent lads’ holiday than was perhaps advisable didn’t seem to count against him.



Hannah L

As a retail assistant at Primark, Hannah already had experience of customer service, which was a big plus on the application form. She came across as friendly and willing to learn. As she had applied for a bar position, she was taken to a separate group to practise her bar-side banter and make cocktails. “Remembering which drinks made up which cocktail was difficult,” she admits. “But I’d say I’m a very outgoing person and I love to make people smile, so TGI’s seemed like the perfect opportunity. I would love to work in a business that is very people-focused.”



teams to easily determine which online media is most effective for them.

“The candidates we need for future international growth are no longer available via the more traditional paths,” Becker says.

“We knew we needed to be attractive digitally, to be attracting the right profile... Through optimising our digital output, we have reached a much broader base than we did in the past.” Every year, the business receives more than 2,000 applications for 12 graduate jobs across the globe. For the first time in 2014, 30 per cent of them came from Africa, uncovering a pool of talent Becker and her team weren’t aware of. “Candidates in a lot of emerging markets are often better connected digitally than in more established markets,” she says.

The rise of digital solutions, and the increased uptake of applicant tracking systems, is changing the balance between in-house recruiters and agencies, and leading a number of large businesses to use in-house capabilities for all but the most specialised roles. According to LinkedIn’s 2015 *Global Recruitment Trends*

report, online jobs boards are still the preferred method of recruitment for 74 per cent of organisations, with

SMEs most likely to turn to them as their main route to talent. But

according to a survey of UK Twitter users, four in 10 people prefer to use the social media site to learn about new companies, and 38 per cent to job-hunt.

There is a general misalignment between where talent is accessing its information and where employers are investing time and resources: despite 64 per cent of global recruiters reportedly developing their own careers websites, less than 30 per cent of them are mobile-optimised – despite smartphones being the fastest-growing way to search for a role.

This mismatch extends to strategic priorities. Employer brand is the key to attracting top talent, according to 75 per cent of business leaders who responded

“Asking managers to interview without a CV or prior information creates a different conversation”



to a LinkedIn survey. Yet most of what we consider employer branding still takes place offline. Rob Bailey, consultant with business psychology consultancy OPP, warns that if you're not managing your company's online reputation, other people will do it for you. And the rise of TripAdvisor-style company review sites like Glassdoor means word will get out if your brand fails to match employee experiences. Investment in your company's reputation has to be proportionate to achieving it in reality, says Bailey.

O2's Pickering says social media is just one example of how quickly the recruitment market is evolving: "Three years ago, social media was just a great way of young people communicating with each other," she says. "We now have a team in excess of 20 dedicated to talking to our customer base and, ultimately our potential recruits via social media."

With the average age of a Facebook user at 40.5 years, and more than 50 per cent of Twitter users aged over 35, the adage that only Gen Y hangs out on social media has been debunked. "Social media gives you access to a wide range of unique, distinct communities, like Mumsnet or BAME populations. Just make sure your staff are up to scratch with their responsibilities online," Bailey says.

In some areas, agencies are flourishing. LinkedIn reports that 51 per cent of UK organisations rely on recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) when recruiting en masse and to find niche talent pools. For major projects with huge short-term requirements, agencies with market

expertise remain essential. Valerie Todd, talent and resources director at Crossrail Ltd, says the team resourcing the project has taken on two contracting partners to help upstaff it to 55,000 people in double-quick time. "Developing a partnership with organisations who understood what we were trying to achieve, who understood the values of the organisation, but who also saw the imperative, was a crucial first step in helping us find international resource," she says.

The difficulty comes when accessing skills that just can't be found locally. "We don't really have a mining culture in the country any more, so when we were looking at tunnelling superintendents to supervise the mining, we advertised in a Donegal newspaper because there's a big mining community out there," says Dawn Barker, Crossrail's head of HR.

Shoesmith admits that such is the nature of new recruitment techniques, there will always be cases of trial and error. In 2014, LGRP ran an £80,000 advertising campaign with a national newspaper, which brought in just two social workers. "By contrast, we developed our own online talent bank and used Google Optimization to try and promote the roles via keyword searches. A £5,000 project yielded eight social workers," he says. The trick is

The winners



Lyndell, Hannah C and Wesley successfully landed a job with TGI Friday's. But while Hannah L didn't manage to nab one of the eight bar positions in the new store, she's optimistic about the next interview. "I loved the experience and would have loved the job, but I guess this one just wasn't for me," she says.

training existing HR team members to work with new technologies and allowing them to experiment.

For some, it is technology that has driven the change, and staying up to date is their main priority. But increasingly, the evolving nature of the labour market has led to broad behavioural shifts employers will have to understand in order to recruit for the future.

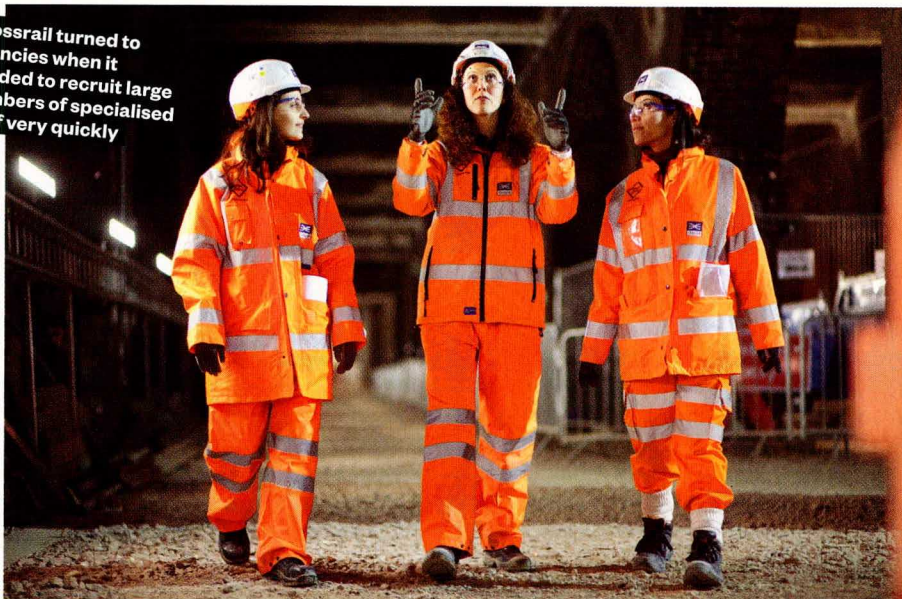
Gifford predicts a rise in the number of organisations adopting job trials, or hiring people on the basis of them having already worked for the organisation, directly or indirectly.

For O'Reilly, it comes down to having a three-pronged approach: testing someone's ability to do the role, their skills, qualifications and experience; identifying a candidate's innate drivers to want to do the job, and their enjoyment of the task at hand; and finally, their cultural fit – why would someone opt to do it here?

And really, she says, it's still as simple as that. "I completely understand that companies are looking for efficiencies, but the reality is the closer you get to designing your recruitment process around that setup, the closer you are to finding the right talent for your organisation's growth," she says. **PM**

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Crossrail turned to agencies when it needed to recruit large numbers of specialised staff very quickly



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